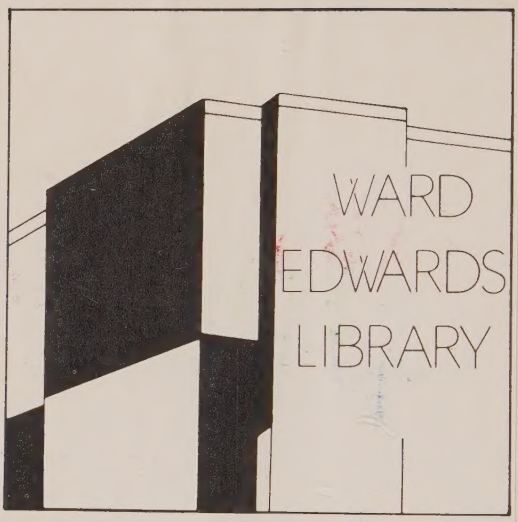

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Walt Whitman: his life and work

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WALT WHITMAN

BY

BLISS PERRY

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PREFACE

THE publishers of this book hoped for many years that Mr. John Burroughs, one of Walt Whitman's oldest friends, would write Whitman's Life. As other literary engagements prevented Mr. Burroughs from carrying out this plan, I was asked to undertake the present volume. Mr. Burroughs has generously aided me in many ways, and has allowed me to make use of manuscript material in his possession. Mrs. Ellen M. Calder of Providence, the widow of Whitman's friend William Douglas O'Connor, promptly placed in my hands the very large collection of letters by the poet and by his friends and correspondents, originally gathered by Mr. O'Connor. Mr. J. T. Trowbridge and Professor Edward Dowden have allowed me to draw freely upon Whitman's letters to them.

I am also indebted to Mr. E. C. Stedman, to Dr. Weir Mitchell, and to Mr. R. W. Gilder for their courteous assistance. Dr. Talcott Williams

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of Philadelphia, with his characteristic generosity toward literary workers, gave me access to his rich collection of Whitman material. Mr. Horace Traubel, one of Whitman's literary executors, and Mr. Laurens Maynard of Small, Maynard & Co., Whitman's publishers, have aided me in every way possible. I am indebted to Mr. Charles H. Ames of Boston for pointing out the singular stylistic correspondence between Samuel Warren's *The Lily and the Bee* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.[1] My thanks are due to Professor Charles F. Richardson of Dartmouth for writing out the curious story of Whitman's visit to Hanover in 1872; and to John Boyd Thacher, Esq., of Albany, for allowing me to print, from the manuscript in his possession, Whitman's interesting criticism of his own poem on that occasion.

My acknowledgments should also be made to William Sloane Kennedy, to Professor F. N. Scott of the University of Michigan, to Mr. Albert Phelps of New Orleans, to Professor George H. Palmer of Harvard University, to Mr. William Roscoe Thayer, to Miss Jeannette Gilder, and to Miss Elizabeth Porter Gould, for

[1] See Appendix.

information which has proved of service. Two books about Whitman which have appeared while my own work was in progress — H. B. Binns's *Life of Walt Whitman* and Horace Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden* — have helped me at many points.

My friend Mr. M. A. DeWolfe Howe has been good enough to read this volume in manuscript, and to give me the opportunity of profiting by a criticism as accomplished as it is kindly.

BLISS PERRY.

CAMBRIDGE, June, 1906.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THE hospitable reception given to the first edition of this book, both in this country and in England, is naturally gratifying to its author. I wish especially to thank the many surviving friends of the poet who have written me that this brief biography does justice to the man they knew. Certain passages, however, have given offense to Whitman's literary executors. In a few instances I have been able to modify the phraseology of the first edition. All of the changes are indicated in the Appendix, where I have also

printed some extracts from letters written to correct this or that detail. For all such criticism I wish to express my obligation.

With regard to certain phases of Whitman's life, I have had to depend upon verbal testimony. Some of this testimony was in the nature of the case confidential, and although it had to do with controverted questions, I have not felt at liberty to give in every instance the authority for the statements which I have made, although I have been challenged to do so by *The Conservator*. I do not care to have the persons who have been kind enough to assist me in a somewhat difficult task subjected to personal abuse in *The Conservator*, and I prefer to take the full responsibility for what I have printed.

B. P.

CAMBRIDGE, January, 1908.

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WALT WHITMAN

WALT WHITMAN

CHAPTER I

A CHILD WENT FORTH

"Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born,
Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother."

Leaves of Grass.

To find the birthplace of Walt Whitman one must journey thirty miles eastward from New York, by the Long Island Railroad. It is a flat, pleasant country, now more suburban than rural. Long Island Sound is on the left, but is out of sight. By and by the track begins to climb among thickly wooded hills. Here is Cold Spring, the border town of Suffolk County, and the next stop is Huntington, where one leaves the train. The main village, a mile north of the railroad, clusters sleepily around the Harbor, a deep inlet from the Sound. The good anchorage, and the fertile, well-watered farm lands around it, early attracted colonists from New England, who were, according to a local historian, "earnest in cherishing and extending the genial influence of

Christianity." Huntington was thus settled in 1653 by a colony from Sandwich, Massachusetts. For some six miles square of excellent land they paid the native Indians "6 coats, 6 kettles, 6 hatchets, 6 howes, 6 shirts, 10 knives, 6 fathom of wampum, 30 muxes [eel-spears], 30 needles." Three years later the township was increased by the Eastern Purchase, "in consideration of two coates, fore shertes, seven quarts of licker and aleven ounces of powder." [1] It does not appear, however, that there were any Whitmans among these promoters of the genial influences of Christianity. By 1660, the little settlement of Huntington, fearing trouble with the Dutch neighbors who crowded it closely upon the west, passed under the protection of Connecticut. In or about that year, Joseph Whitman,[2] the first known ancestor of Walt, crossed the Sound from Stratford, Connecticut, and took up a farm in Huntington. Undoubtedly he was born

[1] *Huntington Town Records*, vol. i.

[2] Dr. R. M. Bucke and subsequent biographers, including Whitman himself, have supposed that Joseph Whitman was the son of the Rev. Zechariah Whitman, an Independent clergyman of Milford, Conn., who had come from England in 1635, and who was the brother of John Whitman, — the ancestor of most of the American Whitmans, — who had come to Weymouth, Mass., in the *True Love* in 1640. Zechariah Whitman, however, died without issue, leaving his property to a nephew, the Rev. Zechariah Whitman the younger. See *The Descendants of John Whitman*, by C. H. Farnam, New Haven, 1889.

in England, as the records of the General Court of New Haven show that he was a resident of Stratford as early as 1655. His fellow townsmen in Huntington chose him as constable in 1665, and afterwards elected him to other offices. The names of his children cannot definitely be traced, but his grandson Nehemiah was Walt Whitman's great-grandfather. It is not unlikely that the "John Whitman, Sr." who joined the First Church of Huntington in 1728, and held many town offices between 1718 and 1730, was the son of Joseph and the father of Nehemiah.[1] At any rate the tribe increased. In 1694 "Whitman's dale or hollow" is mentioned in a patent establishing the boundaries of Huntington. Within the limits of the township distinct hamlets were already forming, such as Cold Spring, in the northwest corner of the grant, where lived the Dutch family of Van Velsors. Three or four miles south of Huntington Harbor was another hamlet named West Hills, where the long level meadows are suddenly hemmed in by ridges of glacial gravel. From the wooded summits of these hills, — the highest land upon Long Island — one may catch a glimpse to the northward of the Sound, or may see the flash of the Atlantic a dozen miles to the south.

[1] See the *Records of the First Church of Huntington, L. I.*, and the *Huntington Town Records* already cited.

It was here that the Whitmans flourished, their great farms spreading over the fat meadows and up into the woodland. Nehemiah Whitman is said to have owned at one time nearly five hundred acres, tilled by slaves. His wife, the poet's great-grandmother, made a vigorous overseer, swearing at her slaves from horseback, using tobacco freely, and living to be ninety. In Walt Whitman's sketch of Elias Hicks,[1] the famous Quaker preacher, he mentions "my great-grandfather Whitman" as a frequent companion of Elias at merrymakings before the Revolutionary War. But inasmuch as Elias Hicks (1748–1830) was more than forty years younger than Nehemiah Whitman, it is probable that Walt had in mind his grandfather Jesse (1749–1803), who was nearly the same age as the mystical preacher. Jesse Whitman succeeded in due time to the paternal farm and lived in the "old house" — a portion of which was standing until recently — where his father, Nehemiah, had been born and had died. He married in 1775 a schoolmistress, Hannah Brush, and among their children was Walter Whitman (1789–1855) the father of the poet.

Walter Whitman varied the ancestral occupation by turning carpenter and house-builder. He was a big-boned, silent, troubled-looking man,

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 459.

wrathful upon occasion. Though in no wise prominent in the community, he was a good workman, and was respected by his neighbors. Like most of the older families in Huntington, the Whitmans during the eighteenth century had lost the church-going habit. But they "leaned to the Quakers," it was said, and Walter Whitman retained a sort of dumb loyalty to Elias Hicks. "I can remember,"[1] wrote the poet in 1888, describing his boyhood in Brooklyn, sixty years before, "my father coming home toward sunset from his day's work as carpenter, and saying briefly as he throws down an armful of kindling blocks with a bounce on the kitchen floor, 'Come, mother, Elias preaches to-night.'" Then the mother would hasten the supper and the table-cleaning, and they would start for the meeting.

The poet's mother, "a daily and daring rider" in her youth, — a stout, placid matron in a checked gown, as the daguerreotype reveals her, — was Louisa Van Velsor (1795–1873) of Cold Spring. Her father, Major Cornelius Van Velsor, was a loud-voiced, ruddy-faced horse-breeder. The Van Velsors were pure Dutch, but "the Major" had married a young woman of Welsh descent and Quaker sympathies named Amy (Naomi) Williams. Her father was Captain

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 465.

John Williams, a sailor of likable personality, and her mother was Mary Woolley, whom pitiless tradition records as "shiftless." It will thus be seen that Louisa Van Velsor was of mingled Dutch and Welsh blood, with an English strain for tempering. She was almost illiterate, but her son was never weary of praising her as a "perfect mother," and, like many another poet, he seems to have felt more directly indebted to her than to his father for his inheritance of gifts. His description from memory of the long-vanished Van Velsor homestead is full of charm, as he recalls the "rambling dark-gray shingle-sided house, with sheds, pens, a great barn, and much open road-space; . . . the vast kitchen and ample fireplace and the sitting-room adjoining, the plain furniture, the meals, the house full of merry people, my grandmother Amy's sweet old face in its Quaker cap, my grandfather 'the Major,' jovial, red, stout, with sonorous voice and characteristic physiognomy."

As one reads these characterizations of the distaff side of the poet's ancestry, with such adjectives as "jovial," "genial," "shiftless," and "sweet" chiming through them like pleasant bells, one can readily believe that the Van Velsors were more interesting and varied in character than the Whitmans. For more than a century and a half preceding the poet's birth

the Whitmans had lived in Huntington without becoming specially noted for public service or personal distinction. Prosperous and prolific enough, they seem to have been without the intellectual ambition which was sending sons of the New England Whitmans to Harvard and Yale and without the moral fervor that drove Marcus Whitman, in Walt's early manhood, upon his indomitable journeys to and from Oregon. The stock seems to have been at its best about the close of the Revolution. Huntington suffered severely in that struggle, and many of the Whitmans enlisted. In the assessment of taxable property at the end of the war, Isaiah, Nehemiah, and Stephen Whitman, all heads of families, appear as substantial land owners, while Jesse Whitman, Nehemiah's son, is taxed for considerably less. Shortly thereafter the race seems to scatter and decline, producing at last one man of genius, and then swiftly, in the melancholy New England vocabulary, "petering out."

When Walter Whitman the carpenter took home his bride Louisa Van Velsor, in 1816, it was to the "new house," built half a dozen years before. The pilgrim finds it practically unchanged to-day. It stands close to a cross-road, a little to the left of the old main road that runs from Huntington southward across the Island. This old road has now become "New York Avenue,"

and is soon to be invaded by the electric car, but the cross-roads, shaded by scrub oak, locusts, and cedars, retain something of their ancient charm. The gray, wide-shingled, weather-beaten houses — usually with a duck-pond in front and an untrimmed apple orchard behind — are of an eighteenth century type. The Whitman house is scarcely more than twenty feet square, with an "L" still smaller; a high-pitched, awkward roof-tree enough, lately covered with new shingles, but otherwise unaltered. Upon a marble slab affixed to a boulder by the roadside is the inscription: —

To Mark the Birthplace
of Walt Whitman
The Good Gray Poet
Born May 31, 1819
Erected by the Colonial Society
of Huntington, 1905.

The poet was the second of nine children, seven of whom were boys. He was named after his father, but was always called "Walt" in childhood to distinguish him from the carpenter; and though he signed himself "Walter Whitman" during the earliest years of authorship, he reverted in 1855, and held uniformly thereafter, to the more intimate and affectionate boyhood name. He had a brother Jesse, a year older than himself. The next two children were girls, and the fifth child died in infancy. Three

younger brothers bore the patriotic names of Andrew Jackson, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The last, born when Walt was fourteen, became the object of his special care and companionship. The youngest child, Edward, was imbecile; the oldest died a lunatic; and indeed none of the children, except Walt, showed any marked intellectual or moral stamina.[1]

The family life of the Whitmans was characterized by the absolute simplicity common to American rural homes in the early part of the nineteenth century. Whittier, born a dozen years before Walt Whitman, has left pleasing pictures of a boyhood passed under the hard and narrow conditions of the farm. The few glimpses that we have of the Whitman home reveal a less strenuous existence; there is more freedom, spontaneity, laxity, with the same atmosphere of vigorous health. The little Walt must have looked like a sturdy, jolly Dutch baby, with singularly fair skin, hair "black as tar," — as he told Mrs. O'Connor,— and blue-gray eyes that early caught the trick of gazing steadily. His own memories of childhood show how deeply the sights and sounds of West Hills entered into his being :—

"The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass and white and red morning glories, and white and red clover and the song of the phœbe-bird,

[1] See Appendix.

And the third-month lambs and the sow's pink-faint litter, and the mare's foal and the cow's calf,
And the noisy brood of the barn-yard or by the mire of the pond-side."

The picture of his mother, too, is like a Dutch portrait:—

"The mother at home quietly placing the dishes on the supper-table,
The mother with mild words, clean her cap and gown, a wholesome odor falling off her person and clothes as she walks by."

With his father there was less instinctive sympathy, though the following lines must not be construed as a literal sketch of Walter Whitman:—

"The father strong, self-sufficient, manly, mean, angered, unjust.
The blow, the quick loud word, the tight bargain, the crafty lure.
The family usages, the language, the company, the furniture, the yearning and swelling heart."

But evidently it was not always calm in the carpenter's household, and the yearning hearts of the children needed comforting. It may be noted that certain sanctions, which have touched the early years of many poets with a mysterious sense of other-worldliness, were quite absent here. There were no religious observances of any sort in the Whitman household. The father,

though a good workman, was restless and dissatisfied, and seems not to have had the knack of "getting on."

When Walt was only four, the family migrated to Brooklyn, thirty miles away, and for the next few years they lived in various houses on Front, Cranberry, Johnson, and Tillary Streets. "We occupied them, one after the other, but they were mortgaged and we lost them;" so wrote the poet in his old age. But his memories of Brooklyn were for the most part happy, as a boy's should be. The "village," for such it remained legally until 1834, had in 1823, when the Whitmans moved thither, but seven thousand inhabitants. For every purpose of a boy, it was like living in the country. The younger Whitmans seem to have journeyed often back to the old home at West Hills, and to other spots in Queens and Suffolk Counties. The ocean side of Long Island, with its Great South Bay and its atmosphere of storm and shipwreck, made an ineffaceable impression upon Walt Whitman's mind. But the prevailing spirit was one of healthy sport, mingling with the half-apprehended landscape sentiment dear to boyhood. Here are a few reminiscences from *Specimen Days:* —

"Inside the outer bars or beach this south bay is everywhere comparatively shallow; of cold

winters all thick ice on the surface. As a boy I often went forth with a chum or two, on those frozen fields, with hand-sled, axe and eel-spear, after messes of eels. We would cut holes in the ice, sometimes striking quite an eel bonanza, and filling our baskets with great fat, sweet, white-meated fellows. . . . The shores of this bay, winter and summer, and my doings there in early life, are woven all through L. of G." [*Leaves of Grass.*]

One sport which the boy particularly loved was the gathering of sea-gulls' eggs in summer, on the sand of the great bays. He disliked gunning and cared little for fishing, but he loved a boat, and was never weary of roaming on foot, even in very early boyhood, over the wilder places of "Paumanok," as the Indians had called Long Island. The wide Hempstead plains especially fascinated him: "I have often been out on the edges of these plains toward sundown, and can yet recall in fancy the interminable cow-processions, and hear the music of the tin or copper bells clanking far or near, and breathe the cool of the sweet and slightly aromatic evening air, and note the sunset."

But the city, as well as the country, began to furnish memorable sights. When Lafayette made his triumphal tour of America in 1824, he visited Brooklyn, and laid the corner-stone of a

public library. Throngs of children crowded around the excavation to see the distinguished visitor, and Lafayette himself, dismounting from his canary-colored coach, picked up the five-year-old Walt Whitman,— who was no doubt a most chubby and wholesome little fellow, — gave him a kiss, and set him in a safe place. Types of the coming American aristocracy, so sharply different from those of the old world, were soon to confront the boy; for a few years after Lafayette's visit, on a sharp, bright January day, just below Houston street in New York, he saw "a bent, feeble but stout-built very old man, bearded, swathed in rich furs, with a great ermine cap on his head, led and assisted, almost carried, down the steps of his high front stoop (a dozen friends and servants, emulous, carefully holding, guiding him) and then lifted and tuck'd in a gorgeous sleigh, envelop'd in other furs, for a ride. The sleigh was drawn by as fine a team of horses as I ever saw. . . . I remember the spirited champing horses, the driver with his whip, and a fellow-driver by his side, for extra prudence. The old man, the subject of so much attention, I can almost see now. It was John Jacob Astor." [1]

Walt Whitman's schooling was but scanty. In the common schools of Brooklyn, then in

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 12.

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their infancy, instruction was limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic,— with a little grammar and geography. None of his teachers made sufficient impression upon him to be mentioned by name, and he left school forever at the age of thirteen. He never learned any language except English, in spite of his curious fondness in later life for using words borrowed — or sometimes invented — from French and Spanish sources. But he was fond of reading, and happening to enter a lawyer's office as errand boy, he found encouragement from his employers, a father and two sons named Clarke. "I had," he says, "a nice desk and window-nook to myself; Edward C. kindly help'd me at my hand-writing and composition, and (the signal event of my life up to that time) subscribed for me to a big circulating library. For a time I now revel'd in romance-reading of all kinds; first the *Arabian Nights*, all the volumes, an amazing treat. Then, with sorties in very many other directions, took in Walter Scott's novels, one after another, and his poetry."

This agreeable berth was exchanged, after a little, for one in a doctor's office. Then, while still early in his teens, the boy went to work at type-setting in the printing office of the *Long Island Patriot*, a weekly paper owned by the Brooklyn postmaster. Walt, with the other ap-

prentices, boarded with the grand-daughter of a fellow workman, and liked his new employment. He grew rapidly, and at fifteen had nearly a man's height and vigor. One may suspect that he was a somewhat idle apprentice, for he notes "being down Long Island more or less every summer, now east, now west, sometimes months at a stretch."

After a while he left the *Patriot* for the *Star*. Like Franklin and many another young printer, he had already begun to feel the itch of composition. "The first time I ever wanted to write anything enduring," he said in his old age, "was when I saw a ship under full sail, and had the desire to describe it exactly as it seemed to me." He had written some "sentimental bits" for the *Patriot*, and shortly afterwards "had a piece or two in George P. Morris's then celebrated and fashionable *Mirror*, in New York City. I remember with what half-suppressed excitement I used to watch for the big, fat, red-faced, slow-moving, very old English carrier who distributed the *Mirror* in Brooklyn; and when I got one, opening and cutting the leaves with trembling fingers. How it made my heart double-beat to see my piece on the pretty white paper in nice type!" At sixteen he became the owner of a stout volume containing all of Scott's poems; "an inexhaustible mine and treasury" which he

cherished for fifty years. He developed a fondness for debating societies, and at seventeen was a member of more than one, in Brooklyn and in near-by villages. The theatre fascinated him early, and some casual work as a compositor in New York gave him opportunity to indulge his passion for it.

About his eighteenth year he became restless again, and tried school-teaching in country villages in Queens and Suffolk Counties. He "boarded round," and thought this one of the best experiences of his life. All that is really known of Whitman as a school-teacher was gathered from an interview in 1894 with Charles A. Roe,[1] who was his pupil in Flushing, Long Island, when about ten years of age. Though more than half a century had then elapsed, the vivid impression made by the ruddy-cheeked, clear-eyed, kindly teacher had not faded. It must here be summed up briefly. Young Whitman had original ideas, it appears, about teaching mental arithmetic; was fond of describing objects and incidents to his scholars; had authority without severity; was decidedly serious in manner; was diffident with women and "not religious in any way," to the especial regret of a friendly mother of four daughters, with whom he

[1] *Walt Whitman Fellowship Papers*, Philadelphia, April, 1895.

boarded. He was already reputed to have written poetry. He dressed neatly in a black frock coat, was of beautiful complexion and rugged health, and spent every possible moment out of doors. In short, Mr. Roe reported him as "a man out of the average, who strangely attracted our respect and affection."

But the calm and self-reliant young schoolmaster, "with ideas of his own," soon felt once more the stirrings of an inherited restlessness, or perhaps a still deeper instinct that impelled him to widen constantly his circle of experience. The ancestral life upon a Long Island farm offered nothing that he cared for. Teaching had proved pleasant enough; what if writing might be better still? He had long since mastered the trade of a type-setter, and had tasted the first pleasures of authorship; and now what more independent and satisfactory calling could there be for a vigorous young fellow than that of editor, compositor, and distributor of a country newspaper? The experiment is best described in his own words: —

"My first real venture was the *Long Islander*, in my own beautiful town of Huntington, Long Island, New York, in 1839. I was about twenty years old. I had been teaching country school for two or three years in various parts of Suffolk and Queens Counties, but liked printing. I had

been at it while a lad, and learned the trade of compositor, and was encouraged to start a paper in the region where I was born. I went to New York, bought a press and types, hired some little help, but did most of the work myself, including the press-work. Everything seemed turning out well (only my own restlessness prevented my gradually establishing a permanent property there). I bought a good horse, and every week went all around the country serving my papers, devoting one day and night to it. I never had happier jaunts — going over to South Side, to Babylon, down the South Road, across to Smithtown and Comac, and back home. The experiences of those jaunts, the dear old-fashioned farmers and their wives, the stops by the hayfields, the hospitality, the nice dinners, occasional evenings, the girls, the rides through the brush and the smell from the salt of the South roads, come up in my memory to this day, after more than forty years. The *Long Islander* has stuck it out ever since." [1]

Whitman's childhood was now over. As one reviews it, its outward features are clear enough. A stout ancestry of mingled strain, winning a comfortable living from the soil; surroundings of quiet beauty; a home where there was much affection, but few books and scanty culture; a

[1] Reminiscences written for the Camden, N. J. *Press.*

family habit of migration, tinged with unsuccess; a little schooling; a various apprenticeship, ending in a trade; then a taste of teaching, and finally, at twenty, an adventure with running a newspaper. In these external conditions, his life had grown more frankly experimental with each year. Yet beneath its shifting and tentative cover of circumstance a definite personality is plainly to be traced. This dark-haired, pleasant-faced youth, compacted of Dutch calm and English vigor, had a mind and will of his own. Tremulously sensitive to the beauty of the out-door world, with a romantic nature which already reveled in the old faery realm of poetry and imagination, he had lived even in boyhood a full emotional life. There were some evidences, probably unsuspected by himself, of a neurotic tendency. "He was a very good, but very strange boy," said his mother afterward to Colonel Norton. "The time of my boyhood was a very restless and unhappy one; I did not know what to do," he said once to Grace Gilchrist. This is perhaps nothing more than the usual restlessness of adolescence. Yet the story which Whitman told to Mrs. Anne Gilchrist about the extreme nervous terror into which he was thrown, in boyhood, by the sight of a man falling from a hayrick — "I ran miles away" — indicates an excess of emotional endowment,

to which the tragic fate of his oldest and youngest brothers gives significance. It was a fortunate instinct that drove him so early into the open air and into contact with self-contained, strong-muscled men. With something of the innate selfishness of a born sentimentalist, he was nevertheless a loving son and an affectionate brother. He was fond of persons and places and the wholesome common experiences. Of formal education and training he had almost as little as the young Ulysses; but like him he had self-command, shrewdness, patience, and many a blind desire in his pagan heart. So he went forth, and he was to go very far.

CHAPTER II

THE CARESSER OF LIFE

"In me the caresser of life wherever moving."
Leaves of Grass.

In one of the random, undated scraps of writing which Whitman's literary executors have published with such pious care, occurs this memorandum for a future poem: "A Poem — Theme. Be Happy. Going forth, seeing all the beautiful perfect things." These words suggest the *motif* of more than one of his productions, and they may serve to indicate the spirit of blissful vagrancy which dominated his early manhood. As we have seen, he had learned the printer's trade. Like any mediæval apprentice enjoying his *Wanderjahre*, he could find employment when he was pleased to do so. Though not gifted with manual quickness or dexterity, he could perform farm work if necessary, and was capable, after a fashion, of handling carpenter's tools. With this equipment for earning a living, he was quite content. He was economically independent. To give any hostages to fortune by assuming social responsibilities was not in his

plan. Indeed, it is impossible to find any traces of settled plan in Whitman's career until he was well along in the thirties. Certain deep instincts had their way with him, and persistent traits of character are revealed throughout the casual experiences of his curiously prolonged youth. But conscious purpose there was none, except to gratify that "pure organic pleasure" which the young Wordsworth tells us that he drank in, even at the age of ten, from "beauty old as creation." And with Walt Whitman, as with Wordsworth, there was the parallel though slowly-shaping impulse toward some form of literary expression.

As might have been expected, the youthful editor of *The Long Islander* grew weary of his country weekly after a year or two, and his financial backers were equally weary of him. He drifted back to New York. Here, in 1841, he became editor of *The Daily Aurora*, an organ of the Tyler administration. One of his associates has pictured him, not without vividness.[1] Whitman had at twenty-two the look of a man of twenty-five, "tall and graceful in appearance, neat in attire, and possessed a very pleasing and impressive eye and a cheerful, happy-looking countenance. He usually wore a frock coat and a high hat, carried a small cane, and the lapel

[1] William Cauldwell, in the New York *Times*. Quoted in *The Conservator*, July, 1901.

of his coat was almost invariably ornamented with a boutonnière. . . . After he looked over the daily and exchange papers (reaching the den he occupied usually between 11 and 12 o'clock), it was Mr. Whitman's daily habit to stroll down Broadway to the Battery, spending an hour or two amid the trees and enjoying the water view, returning to the office location at about 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon." Unluckily, the senior proprietor of the *Aurora*, who thought Whitman "the laziest fellow who ever undertook to edit a city paper," differed with him upon a point of editorial policy, and the engagement came to an end.

But the personable Mr. Walter Whitman, with his high hat and light cane and boutonnière, was not easily cast down. He was already writing regularly for the *Tattler*, an evening paper. What was of far more consequence, he was proving an acceptable contributor to the *Democratic Review*, at that time the foremost literary journal published in New York. Hawthorne, Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, Thoreau, Whittier and Poe were writing for it. Whitman appeared, not as a verse-writer, but as a story-teller. His first contribution, apparently, was a sketch, "Death in the School-Room" (August, 1841). This was followed by "Wild Frank's Return" (November, 1841), and "Bervance; or Father and

Son" (December, 1841), in a number which also contained signed contributions from Bryant, Whittier, and Longfellow. Then came "The Tomb-Blossoms" (January, 1842), "The Last of the Sacred Army" (March, 1842), "The Child-Ghost; a Story of the Last Loyalist" (May, 1842), and a sketch called "The Angel of Tears" (September, 1842), which is chiefly interesting as proving how very neatly the young journalist could play, if need be, upon the flute of Edgar Allan Poe. A few lines will serve: —

"High, high in space floated the angel Alza. Of the spirits who minister in heaven Alza is not the chief; neither is he employed in deeds of great import, or in the destinies of worlds and generations. Yet if it were possible for envy to enter among the Creatures Beautiful, many would have pined for the station of Alza. There are a million, million invisible eyes which keep constant watch over the earth — each Child of Light having his separate duty. Alza is one of the Angels of Tears."

For nearly three years thereafter nothing traceable to Whitman appeared in the *Democratic Review*. But in August, 1845, he published a story, "Revenge and Requital: a Tale of a Murderer Escaped," which now appears in his *Prose Works* under the title "One Wicked Impulse."

Whittier's "The Shoemaker" — one of the *Songs of Labor* series in which he anticipated Whitman by ten years in chanting the praises of the American workingman — was printed in the same issue. In November appeared Whitman's "Dialogue" against Capital Punishment, in which the interlocutors are The Majesty of the People and A Shivering Convict. "Strangle and Kill in the name of God! O Bible! what follies and monstrous barbarities are defended in *thy* name!" Lowell had already taken the same position, his sonnets "On Reading Wordsworth's Sonnets in Defence of Capital Punishment" having been published in the *Democratic Review* in May, 1842. The "Dialogue" was Whitman's last signed contribution to the *Review*, although its thrifty editor reprinted "The Last of the Sacred Army," unsigned, in November, 1851, in spite of its previous appearance, over the signature of Walter Whitman, in 1842. In September, 1855, as will be seen later, the *Review* honored its old contributor by allowing him to write an anonymous and highly favorable notice of his own *Leaves of Grass*.[1]

Several contributions by Whitman may be

[1] Of the sketches appearing in the *Democratic Review*, four ("Death in the School-Room," "Wild Frank's Return," "The Last Loyalist," and "One Wicked Impulse") are given in the *Prose Works*. The others remain uncollected.

found in the files of *Brother Jonathan*, a New York weekly which flourished during 1842 and 1843. On July 9, 1842, it reprinted a thin little tale, "A Legend of Life and Love," crediting it to "Walter Whitman in *The Democratic Magazine*." [1] A more interesting contribution was Whitman's letter of February 26, 1842, defending Dickens — who was then making his first American tour — from an attack which had appeared in the Washington *Globe*. Under the title "Boz and Democracy" Whitman declares:

"A 'democratic writer,' I take it, is one, the tendency of whose pages is to destroy those old landmarks which pride and fashion have set up, making impassable distinctions between brethren of the Great Family. . . . I consider Mr. Dickens to be a democratic writer. The familiarity with low life wherein Mr. Dickens places his readers is a wholesome familiarity. . . . I cannot lose the opportunity of saying how much I love and esteem him for what he has taught me through his writings."

The first volume of the *American Review* (Wiley and Putnam, N. Y., 1845) contained two tales by Whitman: "The Boy Lover" [2] (May) and "The Death of Wind-foot" (June). "My serious wish," he wrote very sensibly in later life,

[1] I do not find this in the *Democratic Review*.

[2] Now in the *Prose Works*.

" were to have all those crude and boyish pieces quietly dropp'd in oblivion." But the zeal of collectors forbids this, and it is probable that the files of New York periodicals during the forties will yield other fugitive compositions by Whitman, both in prose and verse.[1]

Once he tried his hand at a novel, which was published in November, 1842, as a single issue of the *New World*, a weekly story-paper edited by Park Benjamin. It was announced as follows: "Friends of Temperance Ahoy! *Franklin Evans; or The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times.* By a popular American author. This novel, which is dedicated to the Temperance Societies and the friends of the temperance cause throughout the United States, will create a sensation, both for the ability with which it is written, as well as the interest of the subject, and will be universally read and admired. It was written expressly for the *New World*, by one of the best novelists in this country, with a view to aid the great work of reform, and rescue young men from the demon of Intemperance. The incidents of the plot are wrought out with great effect, and the excellence of its moral and the beneficial

[1] I have been unable to find the date or original place of publication of "The Child and the Profligate," "Lingave's Temptation," "Little Jane" and "Dumb Kate," which appear in the *Prose Works*. (See Appendix.)

effect it will have should interest the friends of the Temperance Reformation in giving the Tale the widest possible circulation."

It is to be feared that the friends of the Temperance Reformation might have been pained if they had detected their novelist in the act of composition. "He wrote it," says a lifelong acquaintance,[1] "mostly in the reading room of Tammany Hall, which was a sort of Bohemian resort, and he afterward told me that he frequently indulged in gin cocktails while writing it, at the 'Pewter Mug,' another resort for Bohemians around the corner in Spruce Street."[2] When the old poet was near his death, he was told by an admirer that he had been searching far and wide for a copy of *Franklin Evans*. Whitman replied fervently that he "hoped to God" that the search would remain unsuccessful.

In truth none of Whitman's early prose possesses any high degree of literary merit. But it is marked by a strong ethical sense and especially by sympathy with the poor and suffering. Though feeble in construction and weakened by that tendency to the lachrymose and the melo-

[1] J. G. Schumaker, Esq., in New York *Tribune*, April 4, 1892.

[2] It should be added that this friend states explicitly: "In all my long acquaintance with Walter I never heard him make use of a profane or indecent word. He was always the gentleman."

dramatic which few American tales of 1840–1850 managed to escape, his stories show a hatred of cruelty and injustice, and a right-mindedness toward the common people, which makes them interesting indications of what was going on in Whitman's mind. Poe is the only contemporary whose style he seems to imitate. "One Wicked Impulse" and "The Child and the Profligate" are perhaps the most characteristic productions, but compared with the vigorous pages of Whitman's later prose the best of this earlier sort are but shadows.

Readers naturally turn to his earliest verse for some hint of the extraordinary manner which was afterward revealed in *Leaves of Grass*. But there is little, if anything, which points that way. In the Appendix to the *Prose Works* four of these early poems are given. The "Dough-Face Song," signed "Paumanok," and originally appearing, Whitman says, in the New York *Evening Post*,[1] consists of twelve six-line stanzas of brisk political satire, cleverly rhymed.

"We do not ask a bold brave front;
We never try that game;
'T would bring the storm upon our heads,
A huge mad storm of shame;
Evade it, brothers — 'compromise'
Will answer just the same."

[1] The precise date is unknown. From the political references in the poem, it was probably written in 1848.

With this poem, as examples of the conventional versification which Whitman at first adopted, belong two poems from *Brother Jonathan* which he did not see fit to reprint. The first appeared on January 29, 1842, and is entitled "Ambition." It opens with eleven lines of correct blank verse, describing the somewhat familiar figure of a solitary young man who asks himself,

> "Shall I, in time to come, be great and famed?"

To this question a cloud-formed shape makes answer, in nine quatrains, two of which may stand for all:—

> "At night, go view the solemn stars
> Those wheeling worlds through time the same,
> How puny seem the widest power,
> The proudest mortal name!
>
> Think too, that all, lowly and rich,
> Dull idiot mind and teeming sense,
> Alike must sleep the endless sleep,
> A hundred seasons hence."

Then, in six more lines of good blank verse and commonplace philosophising the poem is brought to a conclusion. A few weeks later the editor of *Brother Jonathan* printed a second poem by Walter Whitman, "Death of the Nature-Lover," accompanied by this prefatory note: "The following wants but a half-hour's polish to make of it an effusion of very un-

common beauty.—Ed." The first two of the eight stanzas run thus:—

"Not in a gorgeous hall of pride
Where tears fall thick, and loved ones sigh,
Wished he, when the dark hour approach'd,
To drop his veil of flesh and die.

"Amid the thunder-crash of strife,
Where hovers War's ensanguined cloud,
And bright swords flash and banners fly
Above the wounds and groans and blood."

The significance of such productions lies not so much in their intrinsic value, as in the evidence they afford of Whitman's mastery of the usual measures of English poetry. Critics of *Leaves of Grass* have frequently asserted that its author, finding himself incompetent to write in metre and rhyme, hit upon a mode of expression which would hide his weakness as a craftsman. But here he is at twenty-three, writing, both in blank verse and rhyme, poems that may fairly be compared with the average contributions of Lowell, N. P. Willis, and Whittier to the periodicals of the early forties.

Of the three remaining poems preserved in the *Prose Works*, "Sailing the Mississippi at Midnight," written in 1848 or later, is in conventional but jerky quatrains. "Wounded in the House of Friends," a political piece with a motto from the prophet Zechariah, reads like the dis-

integrated blank verse of the later Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatists. Here is evidently a striving for greater freedom than the regular ten-syllabled verse affords, yet it is a decadent measure, looking backward rather than forward. For a hint of any new rhythmical design we must turn rather to "Blood-Money," a passionate anti-slavery poem, with the motto "*Guilty of the body and the blood of Christ.*"

I

Of olden time, when it came to pass
That the beautiful God, Jesus, should finish his work on earth,
Then went Judas, and sold the divine youth,
And took pay for his body.

Curs'd was the deed, even before the sweat of the clutching hand grew dry;
And darkness frown'd upon the seller of the like of God,
Where, as though earth lifted her breast to throw him from her, and heaven refused him,
He hung in the air, self-slaughter'd.

The cycles, with their long shadows, have stalked silently forward,
Since those ancient days — many a pouch enwrapping meanwhile
Its fee, like that paid for the son of Mary.

And still goes one, saying,
"What will ye give me, and I will deliver this man unto you?"
And they make the covenant, and pay the pieces of silver.

II

Look forth, deliverer,
Look forth, first-born of the dead,
Over the tree-tops of paradise ;
See thyself in yet continued bonds,
Toilsome and poor, thou bear'st man's form again,
Thou art reviled, scourged, put into prison,
Hunted from the arrogant equality of the rest ;
With staves and swords throng the willing servants of
authority,
Again they surround thee, mad with devilish spite ;
Toward thee stretch the hands of a multitude, like vultures' talons,
The meanest spit in thy face, they smite thee with their
palms ;
Bruised, bloody and pinion'd is thy body,
More sorrowful than death is thy soul.

Witness of anguish, brother of slaves,
Not with thy price closed the price of thine image :
And still Iscariot plies his trade.[1]

[1] In the *Prose Works* this poem is dated April, 1843, and signed "Paumanok." Whitman elsewhere states (*Prose Works*, p. 196) that it first appeared in the New York *Tribune*. But I have before me an envelope endorsed in Whitman's handwriting, — "Blood-Money (must have been pub. about 1852 – or '3)," and containing this poem, clipped from the New York *Evening Post*, and signed, not "Paumanok" but "Walter Whitman." Furthermore, this *Post* clipping has evidently been used as printer's "copy" for the *Prose Works* version, since in the sixth line it reads "the seller of a Son of God," which has been altered in pencil by Whitman to "the seller of the like of God," the reading which is found in the received text of the poem. It would be interesting to know the date of the actual first publication. I have been unable to find it.

Whitman's early productions are chiefly significant, after all, as proving how slowly he was finding or fashioning his distinctive note as a writer. But writing was itself only an incident in a life crowded with sights and experiences that stirred the healthy young Long Islander with an intoxicating sense of variety and freedom. No reader of his *Specimen Days*[1] can fail to share the glow of enthusiasm with which he portrays the glories of Broadway, the ferry boats hurrying through one of the most picturesque harbors in the world, and the famous omnibuses that used to ply up and down New York's central thoroughfare, guided by the "quick-eyed and wondrous race" of drivers.

London or Paris never produced a more genuine offspring of the pavements than the country-bred Walt Whitman. He drank in the spectacle like a spellbound child. Hour after hour, day after day, year in and year out, he sat in the pilot houses of the ferry boats, with pilot friends whom he recalls lovingly by name, "absorbing shows, accompaniments, surroundings." His seat was quite as likely to be by the side of some ready-tongued driver of a Yellowbird or Redbird omnibus, a driver like Broadway Jack, Pop Rice, Balky Bill, or Pete Callahan. Upon the sidewalk he saw the celebrities of the period:

[1] See particularly, *Specimen Days*, pp. 11–14.

Andrew Jackson, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Walker the filibuster. Or it might be the Prince of Wales, Charles Dickens, or, a little later, the first ambassadors from Japan. He watched James Fenimore Cooper in a courtroom, and called at the *Broadway Journal* office to see its editor, Edgar Allan Poe, about a piece of Whitman's which Poe — "very kindly and human, but subdued, perhaps a little jaded" — had recently published.[1]

Such an enraptured gazer at the human procession could not fail to be fascinated by the theatre. At the old Park Theatre, and the Bowery, the Broadway and Chatham Square theatres, he saw Henry Placide and Fanny Kemble, Sheridan Knowles, Ellen Tree, the younger Kean, Macready, the elder Booth, Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, and many another king and queen of the footlights. In these years he heard all the Italian operas then in vogue, as rendered by such singers as Alboni, Grisi, and Mario. As a newspaper man, Whitman's name was on the free list of the theatres, and the boyish passion for declamation and lyricism, which had so restricted a field in the country debating societies, now thrilled his big sensuous body and set his soul in a tumult.

As he rode up or down the Bowery with Balky Bill and Pete Callahan he would "declaim some

[1] See Appendix.

stormy passage from *Julius Cæsar* or *Richard* (you could roar as loudly as you chose in that heavy, dense, uninterrupted street-bass)." Sometimes these declamations had a far different accompaniment, for in mild weather Whitman went regularly each month to Coney Island, "at that time a long, bare, unfrequented shore, which I had all to myself, and where I loved after bathing, to race up and down the hard sand, and declaim Homer or Shakspere to the surf and seagulls by the hour."

While contact with many varieties of human nature was moulding Whitman's sympathies, his constant attendance upon the great dramas and operas was the chief contribution to his æsthetic education. These singers and actors were to have no small share in shaping the phrases and rhythms of his later verse. He made some effort, also, to become acquainted with the classics of literature. Although the deficiencies of his boyhood education left him deaf to the meaning of all languages but English, one who had learned to love Sir Walter Scott and the *Arabian Nights* was bound to explore some of the enchanted lands of poetry. His adventures are best told in his own words.

"At intervals, summers and falls, I used to go off, sometimes for a week at a stretch, down in the country, or to Long Island's seashores —

there, in the presence of outdoor influences, I went over thoroughly the Old and New Testaments, and absorb'd (probably to better advantage for me than in any library or indoor room — it makes such difference *where* you read,) Shakspere, Ossian, the best translated versions I could get of Homer, Eschylus, Sophocles, the old German Nibelungen, the ancient Hindoo poems, and one or two other masterpieces, Dante's among them. As it happen'd, I read the latter mostly in an old wood. The Iliad (Buckley's prose version) I read first thoroughly on the peninsula of Orient, northeast end of Long Island, in a shelter'd hollow of rocks and sand, with the sea on each side. (I have wondered since why I was not overwhelm'd by those mighty masters. Likely because I read them, as described, in the full presence of Nature, under the sun, with the far-spreading landscape and vistas, or the sea rolling in.) "[1]

To represent Whitman, however, either at this time or at any later period, as a systematic student of books would be misleading. His methods of reading were mainly casual and impressionistic, and he gave to newspapers and magazines the greater portion of his attention. He read widely in the periodical field, clipped or tore out what he liked best, and often made marginal com-

[1] "A Backward Glance," in *Leaves of Grass*, p. 441.

ments upon it. "I discover that I need a thorough posting-up in what Rome and the Romans were," is one of these annotations. His interest in Oriental history was stimulated by frequent visits to a New York museum of Egyptian antiquities. Indeed, he went anywhere and everywhere that his curiosity led him. He frequented shops and factories to talk with the workmen; a habit which he shared, by the way, with his noted townsman, Henry Ward Beecher. Though no church-goer, he liked the oratory of Beecher and other divines, and would sit under them upon occasion. He listened admiringly to Wendell Phillips, Garrison, John P. Hale, and other anti-slavery speakers. In the later phases of his political sympathies, he went on the stump for Polk, as he had for Van Buren, and he is said to have been a delegate to the Convention of Free Soilers in Buffalo in August, 1848. He mingled freely in many sorts of social gatherings in Brooklyn and New York. "I have been with him often in the society of ladies," testifies Mr. Schumaker,[1] "and I never knew of any woman, young or old, but thought him a most agreeable gentleman of great culture." So thought the habitués of Pfaff's famous restaurant on Broadway, where Mr. Whitman enjoyed for a while the amiable distinction of being the only member of

[1] The New York *Tribune*, April 4, 1892, as cited above.

that Bohemian circle who was "never tipsy and never broke." At a later period he did, indeed, borrow from his literary friends at Pfaff's, but he took, as he gave, with a royal ease that still delights the memory of some of his surviving creditors. There was something in his bland, leisurely, magnetic presence, even then, that made for companionship; and with almost any men and women he was ready to fleet the time carelessly as in the golden world. His faithful friend, John Burroughs, writing his *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*, in 1867, judged it discreet to say: "Through this period (1840–1855), without entering into particulars, it is enough to say that he sounded all experiences of life, with all their passions, pleasures and abandonments. He was young, in perfect bodily condition, and had the city of New York and its ample opportunities around him. I trace this period in some of the poems of 'Children of Adam' and occasionally in other parts of his book, including 'Calamus.'"

Endless leisureliness, curiosity, tolerance, mark these dateless years in New York. The record of them is now written ineffaceably in Whitman's verse, but there are no data for following his fortunes month by month, or scarcely year by year. "Weeks grew months, years," as they did in Browning's "Statue and the Bust," but the

sense of brave adventure and the secret glories of a youthful heart did not fade.

At twenty-seven or twenty-eight — the precise date is uncertain — Whitman became editor of the Brooklyn *Eagle*. The *Eagle* was a daily of four small pages only, and the editor's responsibilities were not arduous. Whitman lived with his father and mother, on Myrtle Street, in a little wooden house still standing. He used to stroll very slowly — as was his life-long habit — from his home to the office, which was near Fulton Ferry, a mile and a half away. He left his desk almost every afternoon for another stroll or a swim, frequently taking some journeyman printer from the composing-room as his companion. One of his successors [1] upon the staff of the *Eagle* has given a pleasant account of his editorials. They have the usual unpent freedom of the village newspaper; passing from praise of fresh air, bathing and exercise, to attacks upon capital punishment, slavery, dueling, and the war spirit. They describe a visit to ships just anchored in the East River, or they voice a distrust of trade unions. Everywhere they exhibit a commendable local pride, a strong national sentiment and a wholesome sympathy for the rights of the common man. The style is slovenly, and the

[1] C. M. Skinner, in the *Atlantic Monthly* for November, 1903.

thought quite without distinction. As a spokesman of Democratic politics Whitman possessed a good-natured honesty rather than any partisan fire, and after being "pretty handsomely beaten" by the Whigs in a city election, he announces serenely that the first and largest reason for the defeat "is that we did n't get enough votes by a long shot!"

This connection with the *Eagle* lasted throughout the year 1847, but early in 1848 he made a memorable shift. The occasion for it is best described in his own words.[1] "For two years (as editor of the *Eagle*) I had one of the pleasantest sits of my life — a good owner, good pay, and easy work and hours (it came out about three every afternoon). The troubles in the Democratic party broke forth about those times (1848–49), and I split off with the Radicals, which led to rows with the boss and 'the party' and I lost my place. Being now out of a job, I was offered impromptu (it happened between the acts one night in the lobby of the old Broadway Theatre, near Pearl Street, New York city) a good chance to go down to New Orleans on the staff of the *Crescent*, a daily to be started there with plenty of capital behind it, in opposition to the *Picayune*. One of the owners, Mr. McClure, who was North buying material, met

[1] In the first number of the Camden, N. J., *Courier*.

me walking in the lobby, and though that was our first acquaintance, after fifteen minutes' talk (and a drink) we made a formal bargain, and Mr. McClure paid me $200. down to bind the contract and bear my expenses to New Orleans. I started two days afterward; had a good leisurely time, as the paper was n't to be out in three or four weeks. I enjoyed my journey and Louisiana venture very much."

His companion upon the journey was his favorite brother "Jeff," then fifteen years of age. They went by way of Pennsylvania and Virginia, crossing the Alleghenies, and taking a steamer down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The Mexican war had just closed, and New Orleans was full of the bustle and color of returning soldiery. In the St. Charles Theatre Whitman had a chance to see General Taylor: "a jovial, old, rather stout, plain man, with a wrinkled and dark yellow face," who reminded him of Fenimore Cooper. In Whitman's brief memoranda of his New Orleans experiences his editorial labors for the *Crescent* have no mention except that the situation was "rather a pleasant one." It is unlikely that they were more severe than those upon the *Aurora* and the *Eagle*. But he always remembered regretfully the old French markets on Sunday mornings, where a great mulatto woman used to give

him coffee more delicious than he ever drank afterwards. He lingers affectionately, and with the sensuousness of a naïve nature, upon the "exquisite wines," "the perfect and mild French brandy," and the "splendid and roomy and leisurely barrooms" of the St. Charles and St. Louis hotels. He loved to wander upon the levees, and to talk with the boatmen. Sometimes, in the ceaseless quest for new sensations, he went on Sundays to the old Catholic Cathedral in the French quarter, a district where he was in the habit of promenading. After a few months, however, "Jeff" grew homesick and found the climate unfavorable. The wandering brothers took passage northward by a Mississippi steamer, and made a roundabout journey homeward by way of Chicago and the Great Lakes, stopping at Niagara Falls, and finally reaching New York in June.[1]

Whitman was now in his thirtieth year. The sojourn in the South and the glimpse of what was then the West widened his outlook in many ways, and confirmed him in the pride of American nationality. If a man is at heart a nomad it makes little difference to him whether he wanders over a Concord pasture, returning to his home at nightfall, or gazes upon the Father of Waters and upon our vast inland seas. But for Whitman's future rôle of poetic interpreter of

[1] See Appendix.

American life in its totality, the long journey away from Manhattan and Paumanok was significant. There were other changes in him, too, that must now be noticed, — new horizons opening in the inner life.

Mr. Burroughs's words, already quoted, about Whitman's sounding "all pleasures and abandonments," were written forty years ago. In the case of almost any other person they would be sufficiently specific for the purposes of literary biography. But the controversy over certain phases of Whitman's writings has inevitably raised certain questions as to his own conduct. He has been grossly misjudged in many ways, in default of any evidence, and now that certain facts are clear, they should, I think, be plainly stated.

When Whitman's English friend and admirer, J. A. Symonds, first read "Calamus," — a group of poems celebrating the intimate friendship of men for men, — he had doubts over some lines, and his familiarity with certain passages of Greek literature increased his curiosity. He wrote to Whitman begging for a more exact elucidation,[1] and Whitman, in order to avoid any possible misconstruction, wrote frankly in reply concerning his own early relations with women. This letter, dated August 10, 1890, in Whitman's seventy-second year, has been pub-

[1] See *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, p. 73 and ff., Symonds's *Study of Walt Whitman*, p. 76, and the Appendix.

lished in part.[1] The following sentences are sufficiently explicit: —

"My life, young manhood, mid-age, times South, etc. have been jolly bodily, and doubtless open to criticism. Though unmarried I have had six children — two are dead — one living Southern grandchild, fine boy, writes to me occasionally — circumstances (connected with their fortune and benefit) have separated me from intimate relations."

When this letter was first made public, many of Whitman's stanch friends of the later fifties and the sixties refused to credit its statements, preferring to believe that the old man had been romancing. But it had long been known, to a smaller group of his Camden friends, that Whitman was the father of children, and that he had been visited, in his old age, by a grandson. To one of these friends he promised, while on his death-bed, to tell the whole story, but the time for explanation never came.

In one sense, comment upon this phase of Whitman's life is as superfluous as it is painful. Sins against chastity commonly bring their own punishment. But in our ignorance of all the precise facts concerned in these early entangle-

[1] By Edward Carpenter in the London *Reformer*, February, 1902. This article now forms a chapter of Carpenter's *Days with Walt Whitman*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1906.

ments, we may wisely bear in mind some traits of his character about which there is no reasonable doubt. One of these traits was an unfailing outward respect for women. A daily companion of Whitman in Washington tells me that he never heard him utter a word that could not have been used to his mother. There is overwhelming testimony that for thirty years thereafter his conversation, though often blunt enough, was scrupulously chaste. There is also abundant evidence that from 1862 onward his life was stainless so far as sexual relations were concerned. The long and bitter controversy over the decency of a few of his poems has led many critics to assume that they were dealing with a libertine. But diligent inquiry among Whitman's early associates in Brooklyn, New York, and New Orleans has never produced any evidence that he was known to be a companion of dissolute women. What woman or women bore his children, what unforeseen tides of passion or coils of circumstance swept and encircled him for a while, may never be known. The episode might indeed be passed over with a reluctant phrase or two by his biographers, if it were not for the part it played in the origins of *Leaves of Grass*.

For no poet can "sound all experiences of life, with all their passions, pleasures and aban-

donments," and leave his imagination behind him when he takes the plunge. If Walt Whitman were really, as his friend John Swinton once described him, "a troglodite pure and simple" (i. e. a "primitive" or "cosmic" type of man) literature would not need to concern itself with whatever appetites were sated in his cave. An Ajax may lead a Tecmessa to his tent and become neither a worse nor a better swordsman. But when a Goethe, a Burns or a David takes his Tecmessa home, there are more subtle tricks of imagination and of will to be reckoned with. Whitman's wonderful book, *Leaves of Grass*, is the reflection of an inner illumination, of a mystical sense of union with the world, and this in turn had its reinforcement, if not its origin, in sexual emotion. The book was a child of passion. Its roots are deep down in a young man's body and soul: a clean, sensuous body and a soul untroubled as yet by the darker mysteries.

But to conceive of Walt Whitman as an habitual libertine, even in his youth, is to misunderstand his nature. For any kind of pleasure, says Mr. Chesterton in a recent essay,[1] there is required "a certain shyness, a certain indeterminate hope, a certain boyish expectation. Purity and simplicity are essential to passions, — yes, even to evil passions. Even vice demands a

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, p. 109.

sort of virginity." The shy boy who shrank from the obscenity of the Brooklyn street-corners, who sheltered himself instinctively from any rude jar to his sensibilities, was in due time the very man to be carried away by a tumult of sexual ecstasy, to glorify nakedness, and to declare that nothing is common or unclean. That first modesty, then the "jolly bodily" phase, with its slow subsiding wave of tenderness toward the body, and finally the long chastity and serenity of the clean-minded old age, all belong together as integral elements of a certain type of man.

When Whitman returned from the South, there seemed at first to be but little change in him. "He was the same man he had been, grown older and wiser," says his brother George.[1]

Full-grown at fifteen, he was now, at thirty, decidedly gray of hair and beard. He continued to live with his father and mother, paying board whenever he had the money. For a while, in 1850–51, he interested himself with launching another newspaper, the Brooklyn *Freeman*, a Free-Soil weekly, afterward a daily. His political sympathies, reacting from his earlier Democratic affiliations, gradually turned to the party of "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor and Free

[1] *In Re Walt Whitman.*

Men," which was afterward merged into the new Republican party.[1]

"I guess it was about those years" says his brother George,[2] "he had an idea he could lecture. He wrote what mother called barrels of lectures. We did not know what he was writing. He did not seem more abstracted than usual. He would lie abed late, and after getting up would write a few hours if he took the notion — perhaps would go off the rest of the day. We were all at work — all except Walt." This project of lecturing was one to which Whitman kept recurring, to the end of his life. It guided at intervals his desultory reading, and seemed to promise an opportunity for that personal impress upon other men which his nature had now begun to crave. The earliest lecture of which there is any record was delivered before the Brooklyn Art Union, March 31, 1851. It was printed in the Brooklyn *Daily Advertiser* of April 3, 1851. Only a few sentences appear

[1] *Voices from the Press*, a volume published in New York in 1850, made up of contributions by printers and journalists, contained Whitman's "Tomb Blossoms." In the "Notices of Contributors" prefaced to the book there is a brief account of Walter Whitman, closing with the words: "Mr. Whitman is an ardent politician of the radical democratic school, and lately established the *Daily Freeman* in Brooklyn, to promulgate his favorite 'Free Soil,' and other reformatory doctrines."

[2] *In Re Walt Whitman.*

in the *Prose Works*.[1] The opening paragraphs are interesting in their evident detachment from the pressing concerns of American life.

"Among such a people as the Americans, viewing most things with an eye to pecuniary profit — more for acquiring than enjoying or well developing what they acquire — ambitious of the physical rather than the intellectual; a race to whom matter-of-fact is everything, and the ideal nothing — a nation of whom the steam-engine is no bad symbol — he does a good work who, pausing in the way, calls to the feverish crowd that in the life we live upon this beautiful earth there may after all be something vaster and better than dress and the table, and business and politics.

"There was an idle Persian hundreds of years ago who wrote poems, and he was accosted by one who believed more in thrift. 'Of what use are you?' inquired the supercilious son of traffic. The poet turning plucked a rose and said. 'Of what use is this?' 'To be beautiful, to perfume the air,' answered the man of gains. 'And I', responded the poet, 'am of use to perceive its beauty and to smell its perfume.'

"It is the glorious province of arts and of all artists worthy of the name, to disentangle from whatever obstructs it and nourish in the heart

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 371.

of man the germ of the perception of the truly great, the beautiful and the simple."

After a description of the Creation, he continues: —

"For just as the Lord left it remains yet the beauty of His work. It is now spring. Already the sun has warmed the blood of this old yet ever youthful earth and the early trees are budding and the early flowers beginning to bloom There is not lost one of earth's charms. Upon her bosom yet, after the flight of untold centuries, the freshness of her far beginning lies and still shall lie. With this freshness — with this that the Lord called good, the artist has to do — and it is a beautiful truth that all men contain something of the artist in them. And perhaps it is sometimes the case that the greatest artists live and die, the world and themselves alike ignorant what they possess. Who would not mourn that an ample palace of surpassingly graceful architecture, filled with luxuries and gorgeously embellished with fair pictures and sculpture, should stand cold and still and vacant and never be known and enjoyed by its owner? Would such a fact as this cause you sadness? Then be sad. For there is a palace to which the courts of the most sumptuous kings are but a frivolous patch and though it is always waiting for them, not one in thousands of its owners ever

enters there with any genuine sense of its grandeur and glory.

"To the artist, I say, has been given the command: 'Go forth into all the world and preach the gospel of beauty.' The perfect man is the perfect artist and it cannot be otherwise. For in the much that has been said of nature and art there is mostly the absurd error of considering the two as distinct. Rousseau, himself, in reality one of the most genuine artists, starting from his false point ran into his beautiful encomiums upon nature and his foolish sarcasms upon art."

Then follows a description, quite unwarranted by any historical evidence, of the death-bed of Rousseau, a writer in whom the lecturer felt a strong interest, and whose genius offers, as will be pointed out later, many striking parallelisms to Whitman's.[1] From this fictitious death-bed scene, the lecturer passes to a consideration of the conception of Death in Greek art, and thence to a panegyric of the refined and artistic dignity of Greek life, — drawing his material, as he naïvely states, from "a lecture given the other evening at a neighboring city." The contrast between this perfect ideal of man and the con-

[1] A manuscript translation of several pages of the *Contrat Social*, in Whitman's handwriting, though certainly not made by Whitman himself, and dating from the late forties or early fifties, was discovered among the poet's papers by Dr. Bucke.

ventional American of 1851 then inspires this sarcastic passage, which reveals how far Whitman had already gone on the road that led straight from the tall hat and boutonnière of 1840 to the flannel shirt and tucked-in trousers of 1855.

"Then see him in all the perfection of fashionable tailordom — the tight boot with the high heel; the trousers big at the ankle, on some rule inverting the ordinary ones of grace; the long, large cuffs, and thick stiff collar of his coat — the swallow-tailed coat on which dancing masters are inexorable; the neck swathed in many bands giving support to the modern high and pointed shirt collar, that fearful sight to an approaching enemy — the modern shirt collar, bold as Columbus, stretching off into the unknown distance — and then, to crown all, the fashionable hat, before which language has nothing to say because sight is the only thing that can begin to do it justice — and we have indeed a model for the sculptor."

Finally, with a sound oratorical instinct, the lecturer asserts that heroic action exhibits "the highest phases of the artist spirit."

"Talk not so much then, young artist, of the great old masters who but painted and chiseled. Study not only their productions. There is a still better, higher school for him who would kindle

his fire with coal from the altar of the loftiest and purest art. It is the school of all grand actions and grand virtues, of heroism, of the deaths of captives and martyrs — of all the mighty deeds written in the pages of history — deeds of daring and enthusiasm and devotion and fortitude. Read well the death of Socrates, and of a greater than Socrates. Read how slaves have battled against their oppressors — how the bullets of tyrants have, since the first king ruled, never been able to put down the unquenchable thirst of man for his rights.

"In the sunny peninsula where art was transplanted from Greece and generations afterward flourished into new life, we even now see the growth that is to be expected among a people pervaded by a love and appreciation of beauty. In Naples, in Rome, in Venice, that ardor for liberty which is a constituent part of all well-developed artists and without which a man cannot be such, has had a struggle — a hot and baffled one. The inexplicable destinies have shaped it so. The dead lie in their graves; but their august and beautiful enthusiasm is not dead: —

> "Those corpses of young men,
> Those martyrs that hung from the gibbets,
> Those hearts pierced by the gray lead,
> Cold and motionless as they seem

Live elsewhere with undying vitality ;
They live in other young men, O kings,
They live in brothers again ready to defy you.
They were purified by death ;
They were taught and exalted.
Not a grave of those slaughtered ones
But is growing its seed of freedom,
In its turn to bear seed,
Which the wind shall carry afar and re-sow,
And the rain nourish.
Not a disembodied spirit
Can the weapons of tyrants let loose
But it shall stalk invisibly over the earth
Whispering, counseling, cautioning.

"I conclude here, as there can be no true artist without a glowing thought of freedom, — so freedom pays the artist back again many fold, and under her umbrage Art must sooner or later tower to its loftiest and most perfect proportions."

Strong as was Whitman's impulse, at this time and later, toward a direct oral expression of the thoughts that dominated him, nothing came of the lecturing scheme. With a serene indifference to the mere manner of making a living, he joined his father — a full-lipped, obstinate-eyed, puzzled man, now in his sixties — in building and selling small wooden houses in the outskirts of the rapidly growing city of Brooklyn. John Burroughs tells me that he

does not see how Walt could ever have handled saw and hammer skillfully enough to make him an acceptable carpenter. Yet he continued for three or four years, on and off, to work at the new calling. Local conditions just then made house-building a lucrative venture, and his brothers thought that Walt now had "his chance." But a St. Paul supporting himself by tent-making while his mind brooded upon the new Gospel was not more capable than Whitman of combining manual employment with spiritual preoccupation. Very deliberately, as was his manner in all things, this ruminative and unpractical carpenter began to plan an extraordinary thing,— a book which should embody himself and his country. All that he had experienced was to be a part of it; the life which he had hitherto caressed casually, as one touches now the cheek and now the hand of the beloved, was to yield itself wholly; to lose, as it were, its own individual existence, and to reappear as a Book, but a Book with all the potencies of life so coursing in it that it should seem not so much a Book as a Man.

It was this Book that he was really building, as he sauntered back and forth to his day's work, dinner-pail in hand, and often with a copy of Emerson's Essays in his pocket, to read at noontime. But he was not so absorbed in the construction of a new kind of poetry as to be quite indif-

ferent to what was passing around him. Always quickly concerned with whatever made for the comfort, happiness and freedom of the ordinary citizen, the book-loving carpenter found much to condemn in the city ordinances of Brooklyn. He wrote in 1854 a memorial to the Common Council and Mayor, in behalf of a freer municipal government and against Sunday restrictions.[1] This memorial is not only excellent in spirit, but it states with vigorous common-sense certain principles of municipal administration which still need emphasis. A few characteristic passages may well be given here.

"The mere shutting off from the general body of the citizens of the popular and cheap conveyance of the city railroad, the very day when experience proves they want it most, and the obstinate direction of the whole executive and police force of Brooklyn into a contest with the keepers of public houses, news depots, cigar shops, bakeries, confectionery and eating saloons and other places, whether they shall open or close on Sunday, are not in themselves matters of all-engrossing importance. The stoppage of the Rail cars causes much vexation and weariness to many families, especially in any communication to and from East Brooklyn, Williamsburgh,

[1] Printed in the Brooklyn *Star*, Oct. 20, 1854. I am indebted to Mr. John Burroughs for a copy.

Greenpoint, Bushwick, New Brooklyn, Bedford and Greenwood; and both stoppages do no earthly good. But beneath this the blunder rises from something deeper. These restrictions are part of a radical mistake about the policy and lawful power of an American City Government. . . .

"Shallow people, possessed with zeal for any particular cause, make it a great merit to run to and fro after special prohibitions that shall fix the case and emasculate sin out of our houses and streets. Alas, gentlemen, the civilized world has been overwhelmed with prohibitions for many hundred years. We do not want prohibitions. What is always wanted is a few strong-handed, big-brained, practical, honest men at the lead of affairs. The true friends of the Sabbath and of its purifying and elevating influences, and of many excellent physical and other reforms that mark the present age, are not necessarily those who complacently put themselves forward and seek to carry the good through by penalties and stoppages and arrests and fines. The true friends of elevation and reform are the friends of the fullest rational liberty. For there is this vital and antiseptic power in liberty, that it tends forever and ever to strengthen what is good and erase what is bad.

"For the City or State to become the overseer

and dry nurse of a man and coerce him, any further than before mentioned, into how he must behave himself and when and whither he must travel and by what conveyance, or what he shall be permitted to use or dispose of on certain days of the week, and what forced to disuse, would be to make a poor thing of a man. — In such matters the American sign-posts turn in the same direction for all the grades of our governments. The citizen must have room. He must learn to be so muscular and self-possessed, to rely more on the restrictions of himself than any restriction of statute books or city ordinances or police. This is the feeling that will make live men and superior women. This will make a great athletic spirited city of noble and marked character, with a reputation for itself wherever railroads run and ships sail and newspapers and books are read. . . .

"I have also, gentlemen, with perfect respect to remind you and through you to remind others, including those, whoever they may be, who desire to be your successors, or to hold any office, prominent or subordinate in the city government, of the stern demand in all parts of the Republic, for a better, purer, more generous and comprehensive administration of the affairs of cities; a demand in which I, in common with the quite entire body of my fellow citizens

and fellow taxpayers of Brooklyn, cordially join.

"We believe the mighty interests of so many people, and so much life and wealth should be far less at the sport or dictation of caucuses and cabals. . . . I do not think so highly of what is to be done at the capitols of Washington or Albany. Here it is enough for us to attend to Brooklyn. There is indeed no better scope for practically exhibiting the full sized American idea, than in a great, free, proud American city. Most of our cities are huge aggregates of people, riches and enterprise. The avenues, edifices and furniture are splendid; but what is that to splendor of character? To encourage the growth of trade and property is commendable, but our politics might also encourage the forming of men of superior demeanor and less shuffling and blowing.

"Marked as the size, numbers, elegance and respectability of Brooklyn have become, a more lasting and solid glory of this or any community must always be in personal and might be in municipal qualities. Out of these in ancient times, a few thousand men made the names of their cities immortal. The free and haughty democracy of some of those old towns, not one third our size of population, rated themselves on equal terms with powerful kingdoms, and are

preserved in literature, and the admiration of the earth."

Then follows a glowing description of the city of Brooklyn, and its possibilities of development under a proper civic pride. The letter closes with this characteristic utterance: —

"After all is said, however, the work of establishing and raising the character of cities of course remains at last in their original capacity with the people themselves. Strictly speaking when the proper time comes it comes. Perhaps the citizens have no right to complain of being hampered and cheated and overtaxed and insulted, for they always hold the remedy in their own hands and can apply it whenever they like. I am not the man to soft-soap the people any more than I do office holders, but this I say for them at all times that their very credulity and repeated confidence in others are organic signs of noble elements in the National character.

WALTER WHITMAN."

So far as I am aware, this is the last signed composition of Whitman's previous to the publication, in the following July, of *Leaves of Grass*. In its earnest, lofty conception of the value of the individual man, it may serve to symbolize the close of a long and random chapter

of experience. The boyish, dandified editor of the *Long Islander*, so avid of emotional stimulus, so prodigal of vitality, had become a quiet, slow-footed, gray-bearded workingman. More than a dozen years had passed since his name had first been printed in the table of contents of the *Democratic Review*, side by side with those of Whittier, Bryant, and Longfellow. These writers, together with Hawthorne, Lowell, and other magazinists of the forties, had slowly strengthened their hold upon the public. Whitman had been forgotten. The newer magazines, *Harper's*, founded in 1850, and *Putnam's*, founded in 1853, were already cultivating a younger generation of authors.

To the restless fermentation of thought that marks the decade of 1840–1850 Whitman had in fact contributed nothing, though he had absorbed much. The religious world, the intellectual, social, and economic worlds, had been profoundly shaken by movements that are associated in England with the names of such men as Newman and Pusey, Carlyle, Dickens and Kingsley, Cobden and Bright. The common passion of such spirits as these was the improvement of man. In America, too, the decade had been marked by crusades of every sort. The Transcendentalist belief in the truths that escape the bounds set by the external senses had spread far beyond

Concord and Cambridge. Communism and socialism were in the air, as well as abolitionism and perfectionism. Emerson and Lowell have left witty descriptions of the universal flux of doctrine, the cult of fads of every kind, "the sans-culottism of the forties." Brisbane and Greeley had been expounders of Fourierism. Men as variously endowed as Hawthorne, Ripley and Curtis had sought a common refuge at Brook Farm. Many of the "Disciples of the Newness" took, like Whitman himself, to the open road. "Some went abroad and lived in Europe and were rarely heard from; others dwelt at home and achieved nothing; while others, on the contrary, had the most laborious and exacting careers. Others led lives morally wasted, whether by the mere letting loose of a surge of passion ill restrained, or by the terrible impulse of curiosity which causes more than half the sins of each growing generation, and yet is so hard to distinguish from the heroic search after knowledge. I can think of men among those bred in that period, and seemingly under its full influence, who longed to know the worst of life and knew it, and paid dearly for their knowledge; and their kindred paid more dearly still. . . . Others vanished, and are to this day untraced; and yet all were but a handful compared with the majority which remained true to early dreams while

the world called them erratic, and the church pronounced them unredeemed." [1]

But before Whitman laid down his carpenter's tools, the reaction against Transcendentalism — that American back-current of the wave of English and German Romanticism — had already set in. Both the movement and the reaction may be curiously traced in the careers of three young men who were all born in the same year as Whitman, 1819. W. W. Story, who had married at twenty-three, practised law and written successful law books for six years, suddenly abandoned a brilliant professional career, and with the slightest preparatory training sailed for Italy in 1847 to become an artist. An artist, but an exile, he remained. Charles A. Dana, the famous editor of the New York *Sun*, was in 1841 passing the griddle-cakes at Brook Farm, and contributing religious sonnets to Margaret Fuller's *Dial*. But by 1847 he had joined Ripley, another shipwrecked mariner from Brook Farm, upon the relatively solid ground of the New York *Tribune*. James Russell Lowell, another son of 1819, was crossed in love and meditating suicide in the very year that Walt Whitman was buying type for the *Long Islander*. But in the next

[1] Thomas Wentworth Higginson in the *Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1904: "The Sunny Side of the Transcendental Period," now reprinted in *Part of a Man's Life*.

fifteen years Lowell had weathered his Storm and Stress period, written successful volumes of poetry, grown a trifle weary of the society of reformers, and qualified himself for a professorship at Harvard.

In purely intellectual eagerness and brilliancy each of these three young men surpassed Walt Whitman. At thirty-six each one of them had outlived certain phases of Transcendental enthusiasm and had settled into a definite career. But Whitman, a true child of his age, though an obstinate one, seemed to be prolonging his childhood indefinitely. Like Thackeray, another "caresser of life" until thirty-six, he had thus far been outstripped by many less enduring but swifter rivals. And yet the deeper fact is that Whitman was never really competing with other men for any of the tangible prizes. He was questing. No Romanticist wandering in search of the magic Blue Flower ever carried a heart more tremulously eager for all "the beautiful perfect things." Some of them he found and some of them he missed. Upon the road that he chose to travel he met with much good and much evil. His nature, which was sound and sweet rather than delicate and austere, tranquilly received both good and evil, as into an ample and motherly embrace. For there was a good deal of the woman in Walt Whitman, as well as a good deal

of the man. To find what he had experienced and brooded over, while his Transcendental contemporaries had gone on, leaving him apparently far behind them, we must turn to *Leaves of Grass*.

CHAPTER III

LEAVES OF GRASS

"Like a font of type, poetry must be set up over again consistent with American, modern and democratic institutions." — *Walt Whitman to a New York Herald reporter in 1888.*

"Yes, Walt often spoke to me of his books. I would tell him 'I don't know what you are trying to get at!' And this is the idea I would always arrive at from his reply. All other people in the world have had their representatives in literature: here is a great big race with no representatives. He would undertake to furnish that representative. It was also his object to get a real human being into a book. This had never been done before." — *Peter Doyle, street-car conductor and railroad man, in 1895.*

"A page with as true and inevitable and deep a meaning as a hillside, a book which Nature shall own as her own flower, her own leaves; with whose leaves her own shall rustle in sympathy imperishable and russet; which shall push out with the skunk-cabbage in the spring. I am not offended by the odor of the skunk [-cabbage] in passing by sacred places. I am invigorated rather. It is a reminiscence of immortality borne on the gale. O thou partial world, when wilt thou know God? I would as soon transplant this vegetable to Polynesia or to heaven with me as the violet." — *Thoreau's Journal, May, 1850. Unpublished until 1906.*

In the spring of 1855 Whitman dropped his saw and hammer and began to set up with his

own hands the type for his book, using the printing establishment of Andrew and James Rome at the corner of Cranberry and Fulton Streets, Brooklyn. The first drafts of his "copy" had been written in theatres or ferry-boats and omnibuses, or wherever he happened to be, but it had been revised and elaborated — as he afterward told his friend Dr. Bucke — no less than five times. "I had great trouble," he says in *Specimen Days*, "in leaving out the stock 'poetical' touches, but succeeded at last."

In no sense, therefore, was *Leaves of Grass* an impromptu. It was the result of a purpose which had been slowly forming for years. One of the clearest of Whitman's many formulations of this purpose is found in "A Backward Glance:"

"After continued personal ambition and effort, as a young fellow, to enter with the rest into competition for the usual rewards, business, political, literary, etc., — to take part in the great *mêlée*, both for victory's prize itself and to do some good — after years of those aims and pursuits, I found myself remaining possess'd, at the age of thirty-one to thirty-three, with a special desire and conviction. Or rather, to be quite exact, a desire that had been flitting through my previous life, or hovering on the flanks, mostly indefinite hitherto, had steadily advanced to the front, defined itself, and finally dominated everything else.

This was a feeling or ambition to articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual and æsthetic Personality, in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America — and to exploit that Personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book." [1]

This passage reminds one of the famous opening sentences of the *Confessions* of Rousseau, a book, by the way, which Whitman did not like, in spite of his admiration for its author. But there is no real reason for thinking that Whitman consciously imitated any of the masters of literary autobiography. No path like his had been blazed through the American forest, at least, and he struck into it with all the sensations of a pioneer.

"Write a book of new things" is one of the entries in his notebook of this period. Here are some other significant jottings: "Make no quotations and no reference to any other writers." —"No, I do not choose to write a poem on a lady's sparrow, like Catullus — or on a parrot, like Ovid — nor love songs like Anacreon — nor even [2] . . . like Homer — nor the siege of

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 434.

[2] The dots represent blanks in the MS.

Jerusalem like Tasso — nor . . . nor . . . as Shakespeare! What have these themes to do in America? or what are they to us except as beautiful studies, reminiscences? All those are good — they are what they are — I know they should not have been different — I do not say I will furnish anything better — but instead I will aim at high immortal works — American, the robust, large, manly character — the perfect woman — the illustriousness of sex, which I will celebrate. Shakespeare and Walter Scott are indeed the limners and recorders — as Homer was one before, and the greatest, perhaps, of any recorder. All belong to the class who depict characters and events and they are masters of the kind. I will be also a master after my own kind, making the poems of emotion, as they pass or stay, the poems of freedom, and the exposé of personality — singing in high tones Democracy and the New World of it through These States."[1]

It is a mistake to interpret such note-book passages as these as "tall talk" merely. A poet who chooses, as did Wordsworth, to take himself with uniform seriousness is sure to excite the occasional smile, and there is cause enough for humor in Whitman's penciled comment upon an article on the dangers of egotism

[1] Dr. Bucke notes: "Probably written before 1850."

(in *Graham's Magazine*, March, 1845): "See above and *Beware*." But Whitman was fully as conscious as Wordsworth of the exalted nature of the poet's function, and, like him again, had devoted close attention to the theory of poetic style. Among his "Rules for Composition," written early in the fifties, he mentions: "A perfectly transparent plate-glassy style, artless, with no ornaments, or attempts at ornaments, for their own sake. . . . Take no illustrations whatever from the ancients or classics . . . nor from the royal and aristocratic institutions and forms of Europe. Make no mention or allusion to them whatever except as they relate to the new, present things — to our country — to American character or interests. . . . Common idioms and phrases — Yankeeisms and vulgarisms — cant expressions, when very pat only." In a similar passage of later date, he exclaims: "*No ornamental similes at all — not one: perfect transparent clearness* sanity and health are wanted — *that* is the *divine style* — O if it can be attained —"

Concerning originality and eccentricity he notes:

"The originality must be of the spirit and show itself in new combinations and new meanings and discovering greatness and harmony where there was before thought no greatness.

The style of expression must be carefully purged of anything striking or dazzling or ornamental — and with great severity precluded from all that is eccentric." In commenting upon his reading of Ossian he warns himself: "Don't fall into the Ossianic *by any chance.*" As he passes from the discussion of the mere externals of style to its psychologic basis he is no less interesting, in view of his own subsequent performance: "The best poetry is simply that which has the perfectest beauty — beauty to the ear, beauty to the brain, beauty to the heart, beauty to the time and place."

And finally, there is among Whitman's preparatory notes for *Leaves of Grass* a superb passage which might have stood in Emerson's *American Scholar* address of 1837. Its opening sentences are these: —

"Understand that you can have in your writing no qualities which you do not honestly entertain in yourself. Understand that you cannot keep out of your writing the indication of the evil or shallowness you entertain in yourself. If you love to have a servant stand behind your chair at dinner, it will appear in your writing; if you possess a vile opinion of women, or if you grudge anything, or doubt immortality, these will appear by what you leave unsaid more than by what you say. There is no trick or cunning, no

art or recipe by which you can have in your writing that which you do not possess in yourself." [1]

It was out of this deep self-scrutiny, and after this long period of meditation upon the nature and method of the poet's task, that *Leaves of Grass* came into being. As poetry, it was, like the *Lyrical Ballads*, neither better nor worse for the critical theorizing that preceded it; but as a document in literary history it gains in dignity and significance.

The physical appearance of the book was unique enough. It was a tall, thin quarto, bound in dark green cloth ornamented with flowers. Upon both covers and upon the back appeared the title, *Leaves of Grass*, in decorated gilt lettering. The page was of generous proportions, measuring eleven inches by seven and three quarters. Save for a single reference on page 29 to "Walt Whitman, an American," and for the copyright notice "by Walter Whitman," the author's name was not given; the title page bearing simply the words *Leaves of Grass*, Brooklyn, New York: 1855. Opposite the title page, however, was a steel engraving of the author,[2] from a daguerreotype taken by G. Har-

[1] Printed in *Prose Works*, Camden Edition, vol. vi, pp. 39–42.

[2] The engraving was made in McRae's establishment, by S. Hollyer. The original plate, slightly retouched, is still used by Small, Maynard and Co. for their standard edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

rison in 1854. Few portraits of authors have become more famous. From the top of the black slouch hat to the knees, every line is in keeping with an admirable pose. The left hand is thrust into the trousers pocket, the right hand rests easily upon the hip. The top button of the flannel shirt is open, showing a massive throat. The head, inclined slightly toward the left, is that of a meditative, handsome man, with full steady eyes, sensuous, wistful mouth, and a close-trimmed beard, already gray. If he were really "one of the roughs," this portrait might have been used to disprove it. It presents a poet in workman's clothes, and the flannel shirt and slouch hat are as clearly symbolical as George Fox's leathern breeches, or the peasant dress of Count Tolstoi.

Of the few persons who examined the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, it is not likely that many stopped to read the Preface, — a ten-page essay set in double columns. Yet the book is scarcely to be understood without it, and in the long list of dissertations by poets upon the nature of poetry, it would be difficult to point to one more vigorous and impassioned, although much of it is as inconsecutive as the essays of Emerson which helped to inspire it. Its general theme is the inspiration which the United States offers to the great poet. Amer-

ica does not repel the past, he declares, although the life has gone out of the past. Here, in this teeming nation of nations, is the fullest poetical nature known to history. The genius of the United States is best shown in the common people, and the American poet must express their life. He must love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy. He must reëxamine all that he has been told at school or church or in any book, and dismiss whatever insults his own soul. Thus his very flesh becomes a great poem. He is at one with the universe, and feels the harmony of things with man. He brings all things to bear upon the individual character. The "art of art" is simplicity; it is to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude of animals and trees. Thus the great poet is marked by unconstraint and defiance of precedent. He sees that the soul is as great as anything outside of it; that there is no antagonism between poetry and science, or between the natural and the supernatural, — everything being miraculous and divine. General laws rule, and these make for happiness. The poet, furthermore, must be a champion of political liberty. He must recognize that the actual facts of the American republic are superior to fiction and romance. Candor

and absence of trickery characterize him. His true thrift is to secure the things of the soul.

"Beyond the independence of a little sum laid aside for burial money, and of a few clapboards around and shingles overhead on a lot of American soil owned, and the easy dollars that supply the year's plain clothing and meals, the melancholy prudence of the abandonment of such a great being as man is, to the toss and pallor of years of money-making, with all their scorching days and icy nights and all their stifling deceits and underhand dodgings, or infinitesimals of parlors or shameless stuffing while others starve . . . and all the loss of the bloom and odor of the earth and of the flowers and atmosphere and of the sea and of the taste of the women and men you pass or have to do with in youth or middle age, and the issuing sickness and desperate revolt of a life without elevation or naïveté, and the ghastly chatter of a death without serenity or majesty, is the great fraud upon modern civilization." . . .

The prudence of the great poet, therefore, recognizes that the judgment day is here and now. He must "flood himself with the immediate age." But after all, the final test of poems is their permanence; they are a beginning rather than an ending. The work of the priests is done. Every man shall henceforth be his own priest, finding

his inspiration in the real objects of today, in America. The English language — "the speech of the proud and melancholy races and of all who aspire" — is to be the chosen tongue. The poems distilled from other poems will probably pass away, but the soul of the nations will advance half way to meet the soul of its true poets. And then Whitman closes with a sentence, which in view of his own long waiting for recognition is not without pathos: "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."

Some of the more lyrical passages of this eloquent prelude were afterwards remodeled into verse for "By Blue Ontario's Shore" and other poems. It now appears in his *Prose Works*, but was never again prefaced to subsequent editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Even the brief summary just given reveals how deliberately and with what ardor of faith Whitman gave himself to the audacious task of becoming in his own person the representative poet of his country. Whatever he lacked, it was not self-confidence.

The opening words of the new evangel were curious enough: —

"I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

"I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease . . . observing a spear of summer grass."

These individualistic but not very promising lines introduced a piece filling forty-five pages, or considerably more than half the volume, not counting the preface. Like the eleven shorter pieces which followed it, it had no title. The words *Leaves of Grass* were, in fact, repeated at the head of each of the first six pieces, the remaining six being separated only by a printer's ornamental line. But this long first poem — which in the second edition was entitled "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American," and in the seventh and subsequent editions "Song of Myself" — was fairly typified by that unashamed "I celebrate myself." For it was about the man Walt Whitman, — his body and his soul, his ecstasies in the remembered presence of beauty, his passionate sympathies for men and women, his curiosity and transport with the eternal human spectacle. He identifies himself with this spectacle, now in one aspect of it, now in another: becoming in imagination the hounded slave, the fireman, the soldier and sailor, the priest. Everywhere he beholds God: out of death he sees life arising; he loses for the moment personal identity to become one with the cloud and the grass. He is at once self-intoxicated and world-intoxicated; he cries out,

now with inarticulate rapture and agony, now with a full-toned *Benedicite, omnia opera Domini! Praise Him and magnify Him forever!* Like William Blake, he asserts that "Everything is good in God's eyes," and he would not have shrunk from Blake's corollary, "Collective man is God." The common grass of the field is to him the hieroglyphic symbol of the unutterable mystery that lies close about us. The revelation of the mystery comes through the passionate sense of union with the beloved; and in this physical ecstasy the very atmosphere, the wind and the leaves and the brown earth have a share, so that they in turn excite or soothe the aching senses of the man. As by the ebb and flow of the tide, the universal frame of things thus becomes flooded with personality: in one moment things are made anthropomorphic, and in the next men and women are de-personalized into scarcely sentient flesh. Never was there a stranger pantheism, — flexible, reversible at will. The "Song of Myself" is full of sexual imagery, and the constant shifting of the word "I" from its individual to its symbolic meaning — that is, from the actual Walt Whitman to the typical human being whom the "I" is often used to represent — frequently gives this sexual imagery a startling character. The human body is stripped bare; and in the emo-

tional frenzy which masters the poet, the conventions, and occasionally the decencies, are clean forgotten. Yet these passages, offensive as they will always be to the fastidious, — "it is as if the beasts spoke," said Thoreau, — sprang from a profound sense of the germinal forces of life. It was a Titanic endeavor to express the spirit in terms of the flesh. It was predestined to partial failure, not only because that feat is so insuperably difficult, but also because Whitman was after his fashion a philosopher and prophet as well as a poet, and this was a task calling for pure poetry.

The briefer pieces[1] which followed the "Song of Myself" were not so much separate poems as variations upon the theme announced in the first. They presented different aspects of human experience as envisaged by the typical personality already portrayed. In this sense they present a certain structural unity, and their comparative brevity made them more easy of apprehension. "The Sleepers," for example, could not have presented any real difficulties to the reader who recalled Professor Teufelsdröck's

[1] Using the present titles, these were "A Song for Occupations," "To Think of Time," "The Sleepers," "I Sing the Body Electric," "Faces," "Song of the Answerer," "Europe," "A Boston Ballad," "There was a Child Went Forth," "Who Learns my Lesson Complete," "Great are the Myths."

strange vision from his tower, published in *Sartor Resartus* more than twenty years before.

In fact, a reading public which for a score of years had been familiar with many types of Romantic and Transcendental extravagance, and had already begun to react from them, could not have been so much amazed by the contents of *Leaves of Grass* — aside from its frank nudities — as by its eccentricities of form. The wide pages of the 1855 quarto gave Whitman's long lines a dignity unapproached in any subsequent edition. Yet many of these lines were obviously sentences of prose, which, like the three opening lines already quoted, contained no hint of poetry. There was no use of rhyme or stanza. There was no uniformly recognizable type of metre, although many passages fell into regular metrical beats. Rhythm could indeed be felt, as in all emotional writing whether in prose or verse; but the rhythms of *Leaves of Grass* had been more cunningly modulated and disguised than any one then suspected. To most readers, no doubt, the poetical intention of the work was more apparent than the poetical pattern. The raw material of poetry was flung in with a liberal hand, — emotion, imagination, and many a singing word or phrase. Cadences rich and melancholy, periods full and orotund, made themselves instantly recognized by the attentive reader.

But the tunes were chiefly those of passionate speech rather than of verse. Sometimes there were memories and fragments of well-known metrical forms.

"Downhearted doubters, dull and excluded"

is a line of pure Anglo-Saxon four-stressed alliterative verse. Many passages are composed in a sort of ruined blank verse, like that employed by late Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists; a measure so broken by pauses, by fragmentary lines, by warfare between metrical and logical accent, by sheer willfulness, as to seem of the iambic five-stressed type only through echo and reminiscence. Again, there are single lines of dactylic hexameter: —

"The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner."

"I rise ecstatic through all and sweep with the true gravitation."

Sometimes this dactylic beat continues through more than the normal six intervals, as in the second of the following lines: —

"I laughed content when I heard the voice of my little captain,
We have not struck, he composedly cried, we have just begun our part of the fighting."

Frequently the ear catches the measure of the six-foot anapest which Tennyson used so often

in his later poetry, — either in its normal form, as when Whitman writes : —

"And I know that the hand of God is the elder hand of my own ; "

" And reached till you felt my beard and reached till you held my feet; "

or disguised by substitution, as

" Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths."

It was evident that, however freely Whitman made use of lines or paragraphs of sheer prose, the closing cadences of most of the poems had been constructed with the utmost care. Very characteristic are these final lines : —

" Smile, for your lover comes ! "

" It is nearer and further than they."

"And that was a jet black sunrise."

Yet the rhythmical structure of *Leaves of Grass* is scarcely to be apprehended through the metrical analysis of single lines. Whitman composed — and in this respect, at least, he resembled the great masters of blank verse — with reference to the group, or paragraph of lines, and not merely to the single unit. If read aloud, page after page, the general rhythmic type makes itself felt. It is highly individual, and yet it is clearly related to other well-recognized modes of impassioned literary expression.

On one side it touches the "prose poetry" of Carlyle and Emerson, De Quincey and Poe, — writers with whom Whitman was familiar, and some of whom he had imitated in his earlier productions. Passages from *Sartor Resartus* and from Emerson's *Essays* have frequently been rearranged typographically, without any verbal alteration whatever, so as to look and sound like passages from *Leaves of Grass.* It is well known that Ruskin, for example, brought this rhythm of "prose poetry" so near to actual metre, that the transposition of a few words, and the addition or subtraction of a syllable here and there would turn his prose into verse. William Cairns has pointed out in the London *Chronicle* how easily the following passage from Ruskin's *Notes on Turner* resolves itself into hexameters: —

"'Morning breaks as I write, along those Coniston Fells, and the level mists, motionless and gray beneath the rose of the moorlands, veil the lower woods, and the sleeping village, and the long lawns by the lake shore. Oh, that some one had but told me in my youth, when all my heart seemed to be set on these colors and clouds, that appear for a little while, and then vanish away, how little my love of them would serve me, when the silence of lawn and wood in the dews of morning should be completed; and

all my thoughts should be of those whom, by neither, I was to meet more.'

" 'Morning breaks as I write, o'er the Coniston Fells, and the level,
Motionless mists lie gray beneath the rose of the moorlands,
Veiling the lower woods, the lake, and the slumbering village.
Oh, had some friend in the days when my heart, in youthful emotion,
Seemed to be set on these colors and clouds which appear but to vanish,
Warned me how little my love of their fast-fading beauty would serve, when
Deep and profound over woodland and lake in the dews of the morning,
Rested a silence complete ; and the thoughts which beset me should ever
Dwell on those I should never meet more, or by lake or by woodland.' "

The ease of this transition from skillful, if dangerous, prose to mediocre verse proves the delicacy of Ruskin's ear, and the sharp æsthetic differentiation between rhythmical effect and metrical effect.

Again, the heightened passages of oratory tend, in proportion to their impassioned quality, to fall into regular stress. The natural orators to whom Whitman loved to listen were fond of the heavily accented periods, which, like the cadences of prose poetry, approximate, without quite reach-

ing, metrical regularity. Often, indeed, in orators of florid taste, — precisely as in the pathetic passages of Dickens, — the rhythm slips over into unconscious iambics. Whitman's friend, Robert G. Ingersoll, a well-known popular orator, once described the old classic myths, in a glowing sentence which has been printed [1] without change as verse: —

"They thrilled the veins of Spring with tremulous desire;
Made tawny Summer's billowed breast the throne and home of Love;
Filled Autumn's arms with sun-kissed grapes and gathered sheaves;
And pictured Winter as a weak old king,
Who felt, like Lear, upon his withered face,
Cordelia's tears."

Whitman utilized freely the characteristic effects of both "prose poetry" and oratory, but he varied these effects not only with prose rhythms, but with the tunes of lyric poetry. He admitted, furthermore, his indebtedness to music as suggesting rhythmical variations. He told Mrs. Fanny Raymond Ritter that more of his poems were actually inspired by music than he himself could remember. He frequently compared his interweaving of lyric with descriptive passages to the alternating aria and recitative of an oratorio. That his senses were peculiarly responsive

[1] By Michael Monahan, in *The Papyrus*.

to all suggestions of movement seems clear. Professor F. N. Scott[1] notes "his delicate susceptibility to certain modes of motion and sequences of sound," particularly the free, swaying, "urging," motions of the ferry-boat, the railroad train, the flight of birds; and, among sounds, those of the wind, the locusts in the tree-tops and the sea.[2]

In endeavoring to analyze his own metrical system Whitman selected the analogy of the waves. In a striking self-criticism, later to be quoted at length, he declared: —

"He dismisses without ceremony all the orthodox accoutrements, tropes, verbal haberdashery, 'feet' and the entire stock in trade of rhyme-talking heroes and heroines and all the lovesick plots of customary poetry, and constructs his verse in a loose and free metre of his own, of an irregular length of lines, apparently lawless at first perusal, although on closer examination a certain regularity appears, like the recurrence of lesser and larger waves on the sea-

[1] In an unpublished paper entitled "A Note on Walt Whitman's Prosody."

[2] An interesting supplement to this is Horace Traubel's note about Whitman's friendships: "He affected pilots, deckhands, transportation men, almost in mass the creatures of *movement*." Paul Elmer More, in a critical essay on Whitman, remarks that the most constant and characteristic of his qualities is the sense of ceaseless indistinct motion.

shore, rolling in without intermission, and fitfully rising and falling." [1]

"*Make this more rhythmical*" is one of the admonitions written in Whitman's notebook during the *Leaves of Grass* period. That sentence is typical of the unending labor with which he wrought at the cadences of his long irregular lines, until they satisfied his ear. He was making careful notes upon English prosody at the same time, and knew something of what he was rejecting, in his striving after a greater freedom and "naturalness." Whitman's impatience with the real or supposed restraints of formal art coincided, in fact, with the instinct for the "return to nature" which had already been potent for more than a generation. William Blake, for example, in the preface to one of those *Prophetic Books* which he composed in a language that was neither verse nor prose, declared: "When this verse was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakspeare, & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of

[1] Compare Professor Scott's independent description, in the paper already quoted. "The Whitmanian line consists, like the prose sentence, of an advancing and retreating wave. He varied the length of these waves, varied the speech rhythm to coincide or conflict with the routine scansion, introduced minor waves and impulses and used alliteration and refrain. . . . He is fairly regular in observing his own prosodic rules."

Rhyming to be a necessary and indispensible part of the verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator, such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild & gentle for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other. Poetry Fetter'd Fetters the Human Race!" [1]

This was doctrine after Whitman's own heart, and it was more widely accepted in the middle of the nineteenth century, both in England and America, than most present-day readers suspect. Among the New England Transcendentalists strict poetic form was often looked upon as a barrier, rather than an aid to expression. The private journals of Thoreau and Emerson are full of rhapsodical passages, the first drafts for poems, which illustrate a metrical and rhythmical lawlessness that was in the very air, although the classical training of Thoreau and Emerson doubtless made them hesitate to print these fresh, formless transcripts of emotional experi-

[1] Blake's *Poetical Works*, edited by John Sampson, Oxford, 1905, p. 327.

ence.[1] There were at least two books, widely read during the fifties and on the shelves of many a family that did not own a Shakespeare, which seemed to prove that conventional poetic form was a negligible element in securing an emotional effect. One was Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*, which Whitman had declaimed by the seashore in his youth, and which he read throughout his life. The prefatory dissertation upon Macpherson's skill as a translator asserts: —

"The measured prose which he has employed possesses considerable advantages above any sort of versification he could have chosen. While it pleases and fills the ear with a variety of harmonious cadences, being, at the same time, freer from constraint in the choice and arrangement of words, it allows the spirit of the original to be exhibited, with more justness, force and simplicity."[2] This was from the pen of the "elegant" Hugh Blair, Professor of Belles Lettres at Edinburgh.

A more cogent example of the popular success then attained by a composition lacking rhyme, metre, and indeed rhythm — except such as inheres in its Biblical phraseology — was presented

[1] See the notes to the Centenary Edition of Emerson's *Poems*, pp. 171, 242, 247. The MSS. of unfinished poems by Sidney Lanier illustrate the same impulse.

[2] *Poems of Ossian.* Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1849, p. 180.

to Whitman in Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*. Tiresome as they seem to-day, those jejune pages certainly satisfied the æsthetic requirements of countless readers who felt that they were reading "poetry." Take, for instance, this passage, which illustrates the enumerative method which Whitman loved.[1]

"Where are the nobles of Nineveh, and mitred rulers of Babylon?
Where are the lords of Edom, and the royal pontiffs of Thebais?
The golden Satrap, and the Tetrarch, — the Hun, and the Druid, and the Celt?
The merchant princes of Phœnicia, and the minds that fashioned Elephanta?
Alas, for the poet hath forgotten them; and lo! they are outcasts of Memory;
Alas, that they are withered leaves, sapless and fallen from the chaplet of fame.
Speak, Etruria, whose bones be these, entombed with costly care, —
Tell out, Herculaneum, the titles that have sounded in those thy palaces, —
Lycian Zanthus, thy citadels are mute, and the honour of their architects hath died;
Copan and Palenque, dreamy ruins in the West, the forest hath swallowed up your sculptures;
Syracuse, — how silent of the past! — Carthage, thou art blotted from remembrance!

[1] Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*. Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1854, p. 142. Other interesting parallelisms with Whitman's methods may be found on pp. 17, 27, 77, 130, 147, etc.

Egypt, wondrous shores, ye are buried in the sandhill of forgetfulness ! "

A far more striking model of rhythmical prose masking as poetry was also at hand. Samuel Warren, the author of the Blackwood novel *Ten Thousand a Year*, which was immensely popular on both sides of the Atlantic, published in 1851 a " Lyrical Soliloquy " in commemoration of the Crystal Palace exhibition. Its title was *The Lily and the Bee.*[1] It describes a day, a night, and an early morning passed in the Crystal Palace, but its real subject, the author declares, is " Man — a unity." Into its rhythmic structure, which is prevalently iambic, are woven passages from the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth. It uses almost every stylistic device now identified with Walt Whitman, — catalogue, ejaculation, apostrophe, epithet, and high astounding term. As the imagination of the author roves from country to country, he exclaims : —

" In dusky, rainless EGYPT now !
Mysterious memories come crowding round —

[1] Reprinted promptly in America by Harpers, and reviewed in *Harper's Monthly* in November, 1851. Later it was included in a new edition of Warren's essays, entitled *Now and Then.* It will be found in vol. iv of Warren's Collected *Works*, Edinburgh edition.

From misty Mizraim to Ibrahim —
Abraham ! Joseph ! Pharaoh's Plagues !
Shepherd Kings ! Sesostris !
Cambyses ! Xerxes ! Alexander ! Ptolemies ! Antony !
Cleopatra ! Cæsar —
Isis ! Osiris ! Temples ! Sphinxes ! Obelisks ! Alexandria !
The Pyramids.
The Nile !
Napoleon ! Nelson !
— Behold, my son, quoth the Royal Mother, this ancient
wondrous country — destined scene of mighty doings — perchance of conflict, deadly, tremendous,
such as the world has never seen, nor warrior
dreamed of.
Even now the attracting centre of world-wide anxieties.
On this spot see settled the eyes of sleepless Statesmen —
Lo ! a British engineer, even while I speak, connects the
Red Sea with the Mediterranean : Alexandria and
Cairo made as one —
Behold Napoleon, deeply intent on the great project !
See him, while the tide of the Red Sea is out, on the self-
same sites traversed three thousand years before
by the children of Israel !
He drinks at the Wells of Moses, at the foot of Mount
Sinai :
He returns and so the tide: The shades of night approach :
behold the hero, just whelmed beneath the waters —
even like the ancient Pharaoh ! —
Had such event been willed on high ! " —

Then, after passing by various nations, including

" Prussia, proud, learned, thoughtful, martial ! " —

a line that one would instinctively ascribe to

Whitman even if one found it in an Egyptian tomb — we return to the author, pacing through the aisles : —

"A unit unperceived,
I sink into the living stream again ! —
Nave, transept, aisles and Galleries,
Pacing untired : insatiate !
Touchstone of character ! capacity ! and knowledge !
Spectacle, now lost in the Spectators : then spectators in the spectacle !
Rich : poor : gentle : simple : wise : foolish : young : old : learned : ignorant : thoughtful : thoughtless : haughty : humble : frivolous : profound :
Every grade of intellect : every shade of character !
. . . . . .
Now he is speaking with brother engineers — English, French, German, Russian — showing the Hydraulic Press, which raised to the height of a hundred feet huge tubes of iron two thousand tons in weight : now the French Turbine : the centrifugal pump : the steam-hammer — oh, mighty Steam !
— Here behold Power !
Exact : docile : delicate : tremendous in operation : dealing, easily, alike with filmy gossamer lace, silk, flax, hemp, cotton, granite, iron ! "

After another sweep through history —

"Glorious De Bouillon Here !
Famed warrior of the Cross ! Conqueror of Ascalon ! Captor of Jerusalem ! Hero of dazzling darkened Tasso's song ! " —

we are brought back again, in true Whitman style, to the author, who, apparently, as Walt once said of himself,

"Stands amused, complacent, compassionate, idle, unitary,
. . . . . .
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it."

And thus the author ejaculates: —

"Poor Bee! Dost thou see ME?
And note my speculations,
Thinking so curiously, all so confident!
Of thee, thy Being, Doings!
— MYSELF! the While!
Unconsciously contemplated by Intelligence, unseen!
Transcending mortal man
Yet far himself from the Supreme
As finite from the Infinite!
This moment loftily scanning ME,
Suspending for awhile his cares sublime,
And gazing down on ME,
On all MY Fellows clustering round
In this our Hive,
Of fancied splendour! vastness!"

It would be hard to find a more curious literary parallel to the structure of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's fidelity to his own programme — "make no quotations and no reference to any other writers" — forbids us to trace many of his "source-books," and it may never be known whether he had read *The Lily and the Bee* before giving the final shape to his 1855 edition. He might easily have taken hints from it, — and

I think it probable that he did, — but a man of his inventive power did not need more than hints.

His own essential model, after all is said, was the rhythmical patterns of the English Bible. Here was precisely that natural stylistic variation between the "terrific," the "gentle," and the "inferior" parts, so desired by William Blake. Here were lyric fragments, of consummate beauty, imbedded in narrative or argumentative passages. The parallelism which constituted the peculiar structural device of Hebrew poetry gave the English of the King James version a heightened rhythm without destroying the flexibility and freedom natural to prose. In this strong, rolling music, this intense feeling, these concrete words expressing primal emotions in daring terms of bodily sensation,[1] Whitman found the charter for the book he wished to write.

As a whole, therefore, *Leaves of Grass* belonged to no one accepted type of poetry. It was a hybrid, with something of the hybrid's exotic and disturbing charm. Whitman spoke of it afterwards as "a new and national declamatory expression," and of his three adjectives the last is the most weighty. *Leaves of Grass* — whatever else it may have been — was superb

[1] Compare Thoreau's dictum: "The poet writes the history of his body." Thoreau's *Journal* for Sept. 29, 1851.

declamation. It was so full of poetry that to deny it the name of "poem" is pedantic; yet "rhapsody" is a more closely descriptive word. To interpret as formal song what was intended for rhapsodical speech is to misread Walt Whitman. Here was no born maker of poetry, like Shelley, transforming his thought and emotions into a new medium and scarcely conscious of the miracle he is achieving; but rather a man burdened with sensations, wrestling with language, and forcing it into accents that are like the beating of his own tumultuous heart. Both Shelley and Whitman "communicate" passion; but in one case we are listening to a pure aria that might conceivably issue from a violin or a skylark, while in the other we are listening to a declaimer with "Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect." Not to apprehend *Leaves of Grass* as a *man speaking* is to miss its purport.

The *Leaves of Grass* of 1855 bore no publishers' imprint, and it was not "published" in any formal way. An edition of a thousand copies was planned, but only about eight hundred seem actually to have been printed. Copies were placed on sale in a few bookstores in New York, Brooklyn and Boston; press copies went to the important periodicals, and complimentary ones to various men of letters. Then came the tragedy of hope deferred. There were practically no

sales. In his old age Whitman used to refer good-naturedly to the one man who actually bought a copy of the 1855 edition. The facts were really not quite so bad as that, but they were bad enough.[1] The indifference began in the author's own household. "I saw the book," remarked Walt's brother George, —[2] "did n't read it at all — did n't think it worth reading — fingered it a little. Mother thought as I did — did not know what to make of it. . . . I remember mother comparing *Hiawatha*[3] to Walt's, and the one seemed to us pretty much the same muddle as the other. Mother said that if *Hiawatha* was poetry, perhaps Walt's was." Walter Whitman the elder died, aged sixty-six, on July 11, the very month that marks the first issue of *Leaves of Grass*. What he thought of his son's production is not recorded. Ten days after his death, one of the presentation copies of *Leaves of Grass* received this most gratifying acknowledgment: —

[1] The copy before me was purchased from James T. Fields, at the Old Corner Bookstore in Boston, on Emerson's recommendation, by William F. Channing. He presented it to his sister-in-law, later the wife of W. D. O'Connor, of whom much is hereafter to be said. It is probable that Theodore Parker's copy, now in the Boston Public Library, was also purchased at the Old Corner Bookstore. Both of these copies bear many admiring pencil-marks.

[2] See *In Re Walt Whitman*, p. 35.

[3] Longfellow's poem was published in November, 1855.

CONCORD, MASS., July 21st, 1855.

DEAR SIR, — I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of *Leaves of Grass*. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seems the sterile and stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our Western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things, said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.

I did not know, until I last night saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office.

I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks, and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

R. W. EMERSON.

Truer or more valued praise than this there could not be, and it is not strange that Whitman was, as his brother George said, "set up." But Emerson's letter remained for a long time the only one of its tenor. Whittier, it is said, threw his presentation copy of *Leaves of Grass* into the fire; and other men of letters angrily returned their copies to the donor. The reviews in newspapers and other periodicals were as divergent as possible. Thanks to Whitman's unwearied interest in collecting press clippings about himself, many of these reviews were published in an appendix to the 1856 edition, and elsewhere.[1] Other notices, hitherto uncollected, may easily be traced in the files of periodicals of that day. Some were utterly condemnatory. The New York *Criterion*[2] characterized the book as "muck" and "obscenity;" the London *Critic* declared that "Walt Whitman is as unacquainted with art as a hog is with mathematics," and that one page "deserves nothing so richly as the public executioner's whip." The Boston *Intelligencer* comments upon its "bombast, egotism, vulgarity and nonsense," and the Boston

[1] *Leaves of Grass Imprints* was a collection of such notices issued by Whitman's publishers, Thayer and Eldridge, Boston, June, 1860.

[2] On O'Connor's copy of *Leaves of Grass Imprints* this notice is credited to R. W. Griswold.

Post upon its "exulting audacity of Priapus-worshipping obscenity."

The Boston *Christian Examiner* uses the phrases "impious libidinousness" and "Ithyphallic audacity." The tone of such comments is fairly representative of most of the briefer notices which the book received. But in many quarters it elicited thoughtful and suggestive criticism. The *North American Review*, at that time published in Boston, under the editorship of Andrew P. Peabody, printed in January, 1856, an unsigned review by Edward Everett Hale. He spoke of the "freshness, simplicity and reality" of the book, "clad in the simplest, truest and often the most nervous English;" of "the wonderful sharpness and distinctness of his imagination;" and affirmed that "there is not a word in it meant to attract readers by its grossness." It is interesting to note that Dr. Hale reaffirmed this judgment more than thirty years afterward.[1]

The New York *Crayon*, founded not long before by the talented journalist and artist W. J. Stillman, printed under the title "The Assembly of Extremes" a joint review of Tennyson's *Maud* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The critic finds both poets too nonchalant of forms;

[1] See W. S. Kennedy's *Reminiscences of Walt Whitman*, London and Paisley, 1896.

and then passes to this clear statement of one result of Whitman's optimism: "To Walt Whitman, all things are alike good — nothing is better than another, and thence there is no ideal, no aspiration, no progress to things better. It is not enough that all things are good, all things are *equally* good, and, therefore, there is no order in creation; no better, no worse, — but all is a democratic level, from which can come no symmetry, in which there is no head, no subordination, no system, and, of course, no result. With a wonderful vigor of thought and intensity of perception, a power, indeed, not often found, *Leaves of Grass* has no ideality, no concentration, no purpose — it is barbarous, undisciplined, like the poetry of a half-civilized people, and, as a whole, useless, save to those miners of thought who prefer the metal in its unworked state." Whether one agrees with it or not, this is surely criticism of a stimulating sort.

Putnam's Monthly for September, 1855, speaks of "a curious and lawless collection of poems . . . neither in rhyme or blank verse, but in a sort of excited prose, broken into lines without any attempt at measure or regularity." The poems themselves, the critic continues, with a shrewd perception of Whitman's indebtedness to his forerunners, "may briefly be described as a compound of the New England transcen-

dentalist and New York rowdy. A fireman or omnibus driver, who had intelligence enough to absorb the speculations of that school of thought which culminated at Boston some fifteen or eighteen years ago, and resources of expression to put them forth again in a form of his own, with sufficient self-conceit and contempt for public taste to affront all usual propriety of diction, might have written this gross yet elevated, this superficial yet profound, this preposterous yet somehow fascinating book."

The Transcendental strain in Whitman, as well as his curious passion for cataloguing, was wittily touched upon by the London *Examiner:* "We must be content to describe this Brooklyn boy as a wild Tupper of the West. . . . Suppose that Mr. Tupper had been brought up to the business of an auctioneer, then banished to the backwoods, compelled to live for a long time as a backwoodsman, and thus contracting a passion for the reading of Emerson and Carlyle; suppose him maddened by this course of reading, and fancying himself not only an Emerson but a Carlyle and an American Shakespeare to boot, when the fits come on, and putting forth his notion of that combination in his own self-satisfied way, and in his own wonderful cadences? In that state he would write a book exactly like Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass.*"

The London *Leader*, on the other hand, thought the book by no means mere food for laughter, and endeavored to point out its "staggering" central principle.

"It seems to resolve itself into an all-attracting egotism — an eternal presence of the individual soul of Walt Whitman in all things, yet in such wise that this one soul shall be presented as a type of all human souls whatsoever. He goes forth into the world, this rough, devil-may-care Yankee; passionately identifies himself with all forms of being, sentient or inanimate; sympathizes deeply with humanity; riots with a kind of Bacchanal fury in the force and fervor of his own sensations; will not have the most vicious or abandoned shut out from final comfort and reconciliation; is delighted with Broadway, New York, and equally in love with the desolate backwoods, and the long stretch of the uninhabited prairie, where the wild beasts wallow in the reeds, and the wilder birds start upward from their nests among the grass; perceives a divine mystery wherever his feet conduct, or his thoughts transport him; and beholds all things tending toward the central and sovereign Me. Such, as we conceive, is the key to this strange, grotesque and bewildering book; yet we are far from saying that the key will unlock all the quirks and oddities of the volume.

Much remains of which we confess we can make nothing; much that seems to us purely fantastical and preposterous; much that appears to our muddy vision gratuitously prosaic, needlessly plain-speaking, disgusting without purpose, and singular without result. There are so many evidences of a noble soul in Whitman's pages that we regret these aberrations, which only have the effect of discrediting what is genuine by the show of something false; and especially do we deplore the unnecessary openness with which Walt reveals to us matters which ought rather to remain in sacred silence. It is good not to be ashamed of Nature; it is good to have an all-inclusive charity; but it is also good, sometimes, to leave the veil across the Temple."

None of the contemporary notices of *Leaves of Grass*, however, are more interesting than those which were composed by its author. There is an amiable story of David Garrick's widow, who is said to have remarked to a young playwright who was bewailing his hard treatment by the critics: "Why don't you write the notices yourself? Davy always did." Whitman, at any rate, throughout his career as a poet, had no scruples about composing laudatory anonymous notices of himself, and sending them to the newspapers. The fact that Spenser, Leigh Hunt, and

other poets had published self-criticisms had early attracted his attention, and he doubtless saw no reason why he should not follow their example. It has sometimes been urged that his anonymous defense of *Leaves of Grass* was called forth by the abusive attacks upon it, but the fact that at least three of his elaborate articles appeared almost immediately after the publication of the book shows that they were part of a deliberate campaign. Believing absolutely in himself and his book, he took a large and unconventional view of the publicity involved; and, indelicate though his procedure unquestionably was, it differs very little from that of countless reputable authors of our own day who do not hesitate to send "literary notes" about themselves to their publishers to be used in exploiting their books.

One, at least, of these pieces of self-exposition should be quoted at some length. It appeared in the Brooklyn *Times* of September 29, 1855, and its style is so characteristic that it is curious that it should not have been attributed to Whitman at once.

"To give judgment on real poems, one needs an account of the poet himself. Very devilish to some, and very divine to some, will appear the poet of these new poems, the 'Leaves of Grass;' an attempt, as they are, of a naïve,

masculine, affectionate, contemplative, sensual, imperious person, to cast into literature not only his own grit and arrogance, but his own flesh and form, undraped, regardless of models, regardless of modesty or law, and ignorant or silently scornful, as at first appears, of all except his own presence and experience, and all outside the fiercely loved land of his birth, and the birth of his parents, and their parents for several generations before him. Politeness this man has none, and regulation he has none. A rude child of the people!—No imitation—No foreigner—but a growth and idiom of America. No discontented—a careless slouch, enjoying to-day. No dilettante democrat—a man who is art-and-part with the commonalty, and with immediate life—loves the streets—loves the docks—loves the free rasping talk of men—likes to be called by his given name, and nobody at all need Mr. him—can laugh with laughers—likes the ungenteel ways of laborers—is not prejudiced one mite against the Irish—talks readily with them—talks readily with niggers—does not make a stand on being a gentleman, nor on learning or manners—eats cheap fare, likes the strong flavored coffee of the coffee-stands in the market, at sunrise—likes a supper of oysters fresh from the oyster-smack—likes to make one at the crowded table among sailors and work-

people — would leave a select soiree of elegant people any time to go with tumultuous men, roughs, receive their caresses and welcome, listen to their noise, oaths, smut, fluency, laughter, repartee — and can preserve his presence perfectly among these, and the like of these. The effects he produces in his poems are no effects of artists or the arts, but effects of the original eye or arm, or the actual atmosphere, or tree, or bird. You may feel the unconscious teaching of a fine brute, but will never feel the artificial teaching of a fine writer or speaker.

"Other poets celebrate great events, personages, romances, wars, loves, passions, the victories and power of their country, or some real or imagined incident — and polish their work and come to conclusions, and satisfy the reader. This poet celebrates natural propensities in himself; and that is the way he celebrates all. He comes to no conclusions, and does not satisfy the reader. He certainly leaves him what the serpent left the woman and the man, the taste of the Paradisaic tree of the knowledge of good and evil, never to be erased again.

"What good is it to argue about egotism? There can be no two thoughts on Walt Whitman's egotism. That is avowedly what he steps out of the crowd and turns and faces them for. Mark, critics! Otherwise is not used for you the

key that leads to the use of the other keys to this well-enveloped man. His whole work, his life, manners, friendships, writings, all have among their leading purposes an evident purpose to stamp a new type of character, namely his own, and indelibly fix it and publish it, not for a model but an illustration, for the present and future of American letters and American young men, for the south the same as the north, and for the Pacific and Mississippi country, and Wisconsin and Texas and Kansas and Canada and Havana and Nicaragua, just as much as New York and Boston. Whatever is needed toward this achievement, he puts his hand to, and lets imputations take their time to die.

"First be yourself what you would show in your poem — such seems to be this man's example and inferred rebuke to the schools of poets. He makes no allusions to books or writers; their spirits do not seem to have touched him; he has not a word to say for or against them, or their theories or ways. He never offers others; what he continually offers is the man whom our Brooklynites know so well. Of pure American breed, large and lusty — age thirty-six years, (1855) — never once using medicine — never dressed in black, always dressed freely and clean in strong clothes — neck open, shirt-collar flat and broad, countenance tawny transparent red,

beard well-mottled with white, hair like hay after it has been mowed in the field and lies tossed and streaked — his physiology corroborating a rugged phrenology — a person singularly beloved and looked toward, especially by young men and the illiterate — one who has firm attachments there, and associates there — one who does not associate with literary people — a man never called upon to make speeches at public dinners — never on platforms amid the crowds of clergymen, or professors, or aldermen, or congressmen — rather down in the bay with pilots in their pilot-boat — or off on a cruise with fishers in a fishing-smack — or riding on a Broadway omnibus, side by side with the driver — or with a band of loungers over the open grounds of the country — fond of New York and Brooklyn — fond of the life of the great ferries — one whom, if you should meet, you need not expect to meet an extraordinary person — one in whom you will see the singularity which consists in no singularity — whose contact is no dazzle or fascination, nor requires any deference, but has the easy fascination of what is homely and accustomed — as of something you knew before, and was waiting for — there you have Walt Whitman, the begetter of a new offspring out of literature, taking with easy nonchalance the chances of its present reception, and, through all misunderstandings

and distrusts, the chances of its future reception — preferring always to speak for himself rather than have others speak for him." Precisely!

A second article by Whitman, appearing in the *American Phrenological Journal*, published by Fowler and Wells of New York, who were shortly to become the publishers of the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, is entitled "An English and an American Poet," and is devoted to a comparison of Whitman's *Leaves* with Tennyson's *Maud*. Admitting that Tennyson "is a real poet, in spite of his ennui and his aristocracy," the anonymous reviewer nevertheless considers Walt Whitman the "haughtiest of writers that has ever yet written and printed a book. His is to prove either the most lamentable of failures or the most glorious of triumphs in the known history of literature. And after all we have written we confess our brain-felt and heart-felt inability to decide which we think it is likely to be."

A certain caution, not unbecoming to a literary prophet, may be traced in that last sentence. But in the third of Whitman's anonymous self-reviews, there is no hedging. It appeared in the magazine that had welcomed him a dozen years before,—the *United States and Democratic Review*, for September, 1855. The stout old *Review* was sailing into troubled political waters in those

days, and changing pilots rather often, but it carried the burden of Whitman's fortunes gallantly enough. "An American bard at last!" triumphantly begins the article, which is too long to be printed here.[1] "One of the roughs, large, proud, affectionate, eating, drinking and breeding, his costume manly and free, his face sunburnt and bearded, his postures strong and erect, his voice bringing hope and prophecy to the generous races of young and old. We shall cease shamming and be what we really are. We shall start an athletic and defiant literature. We realize now how it is, and what was most lacking. The interior American republic shall also be declared free and independent."

So it marches, page after page, until the reviewer, closing with a crescendo passage, gravely salutes the poet: "You have come in good time, Walt Whitman! In opinions, in manners, in costumes, in books, in the aims and occupancy of life, in associates, in poems, conformity to all unnatural and tainted customs passes without remark, while perfect naturalness, health, faith, self-reliance, and all primal expressions of the manliest love and friendship, subject one to the stare and controversy of the world."

The practical difficulty was that in spite of all

[1] The three reviews just quoted were printed in *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, and later in *In Re Walt Whitman*.

this excellent advertising and "the stare and controversy of the world," the edition of 1855 could not be sold. In vain did Whitman print several pages of press-notices, including the three written by himself, and bind them into the unsold remainder of the edition. People did not want it. Then, with the stubborn Dutch patience which underlay the *poseur*, he determined upon the course which he was to follow to the end. "When the book aroused such a tempest of anger and condemnation everywhere," he said afterward, "I went off to the east end of Long Island and Peconic Bay. Then came back to New York with the confirmed resolution, from which I never afterward wavered, to go on with my poetic enterprise in my own way and finish it as well as I could." He gave up the carpenter's trade forever, and continuing to live under his mother's roof, set himself to the composition of new poems.

By June, 1856, he was ready with his second edition, a fat sixteenmo of 384 pages, containing thirty-two poems in all, including eleven out of the twelve originally published. All of the poems were numbered and furnished with titles. Among the new pieces were the significant ones now known under the titles "Salut au Monde," "Song of the Broad-Axe," "By Blue Ontario's Shore," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Song of the Open Road." Two or three of the briefer

poems were daring — even for Whitman — both in title and treatment. In the pieces retained from the first edition the alterations were slight. The preface disappeared, though certain passages from it now emerged as verse. The portrait was retained. No publisher's name appeared, Messrs. Fowler and Wells of New York, who brought out the edition, preferring to withhold their imprint. The most striking external feature of the volume was an extract from Emerson's letter of the year before, now printed in gilt letters upon the back of the new and enlarged edition: —

I GREET YOU AT
THE BEGINNING OF A GREAT CAREER.
R. W. EMERSON.

Few acts of Whitman's life were more resented by fellow-writers than this unauthorized use of a personal letter. Yet Charles A. Dana, a friend of both men, had counseled Whitman to utilize Emerson's praise, and it is unlikely that Whitman, who was quite without natural delicacy in such matters, saw any good reason for hiding under a bushel the glorious candle which Emerson had lighted. But the Concord philosopher was, for the moment, pardonably annoyed. A friend [1] who happened to be Emerson's guest on

[1] Mr. Josiah P. Quincy of Boston.

the day the book arrived in Concord has kindly written out for me his recollection of the incident: —

"Mr. Emerson came into his study at Concord where I was sitting, bearing in his hand a book which he had just received. This was the new edition of Whitman's book with the words 'I greet you at the beginning of a great career. R. W. Emerson,' printed in gold letters upon the cover. Emerson looked troubled, and expressed annoyance that a sentence from a private letter should be wrenched from its context and so emblazoned. He afterwards gave me the book, saying that the inside was worthy attention even though it came from one capable of so misusing the cover. I noted the incident because at no other time had I seen a cloud of dissatisfaction darken that serene countenance."

A less conspicuous but far more regrettable feature of this edition was the appendix entitled "Leaves-Droppings." It consisted chiefly of press-notices, but prefaced these with Emerson's letter of July, 1855, and with an extraordinary and most disingenuous answer, which begins thus: —

Brooklyn, August, 1856.

Here are thirty-two Poems, which I send you, dear Friend and Master, not having found how I could satisfy myself with sending any usual

acknowledgment of your letter. The first edition, on which you mailed me that till now unanswered letter, was twelve poems — I printed a thousand copies, and they readily sold ; these thirty-two Poems I stereotype, to print several thousand copies of. I much enjoy making poems. Other work I have set for myself to do, to meet people and The States face to face, to confront them with an American rude tongue ; but the work of my life is making poems. I keep on till I make a hundred, and then several hundred — perhaps a thousand. The way is clear to me. A few years, and the average annual call for my Poems is ten or twenty thousand copies — more, quite likely. Why should I hurry or compromise ? In poems or in speeches I say the word or two that has got to be said, adhere to the body, step with the countless common footsteps, and remind every man or woman of something.

"Master, I am a man who has perfect faith. Master, we have not come through centuries, caste, heroisms, fables, to halt in this land today."

To say nothing of its romancing about the sale of the first edition, the tone of this opening is so mawkish as to leave an unpleasant impression as to Whitman's nervous condition at the time. He was over-excited, no doubt, and felt that he was playing for high stakes. The letter

is mainly devoted to a plea for a masculine and native American literature, and Emerson must have recognized in it a curious echo and product of his own "American Scholar" address of nineteen years before, — that address which Holmes fitly characterized as "our intellectual Declaration of Independence." Whitman's own sense of his indebtedness is clearly confessed at the close, where, after speaking of the "new moral American continent" without which the physical continent remained incomplete, he declares: —

Those shores you found. I say you have led The States there — have led Me there. I say that none has ever done or ever can do, a greater deed for The States, than your deed. Others may line out the lines, build cities, work mines, break up farms; it is yours to have been the original true Captain who put to sea, intuitive, positive, rendering the first report, to be told less by any report, and more by the mariners of a thousand bays, in each tack of their arriving and departing, many years after you.

Receive, dear Master, these statements and assurances through me, for all the young men, and for an earnest that we know none before you, but the best following you; and that we demand to take your name into our keeping, and that we

understand what you have indicated, and find the same indicated in ourselves, and that we will stick to it and enlarge upon it through These States.

WALT WHITMAN.

But if the cover and the appendix of the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* revealed the social and moral obtuseness of a man walking in the primrose path of self-exploitation, the volume nevertheless showed indubitable literary power. In vividness of phrase, in haunting cadence, in largeness of imagination, and in what Henry Sidgwick was later to term "cosmic emotion," there had been no American book comparable with it. Its anomalous form and its "unwise excursions into *tacenda*" soon proved, however, to be obstacles which contemporary criticism could not surmount. The newspaper notices of the second edition were, if anything, more condemnatory than those of the previous year, partly, no doubt, because the book contained a few pieces whose frank animality was more apparent than any poetical quality. Fowler and Wells, alarmed at the outcry, refused to sell the volume which they had manufactured.

In face of the disappointment Whitman stolidly held his ground. He began to be visited by men of intellectual distinction, curious to see

what he was like. Moncure D. Conway, a young Virginian who had gone to Concord in order to be near Emerson, was advised by the latter to call upon Whitman in Brooklyn. He had found him, September 17, 1855, revising proof at Rome's printing-office, and "came off delighted with him." Whitman told Conway that he was the first who had visited him because of his book.[1] Emerson himself came not long afterward, as did A. Bronson Alcott, the vague and impractical high priest of Transcendentalism, who found much in Whitman to approve. William Cullen Bryant, the austere and pure, already over sixty and carrying the burden of his editorship of the *Evening Post*, crossed Brooklyn Ferry to have long talks and walks with the author of *Leaves of Grass*.[2] Another visitor was Henry D. Thoreau, who had made his first call in company with Alcott. Thoreau's first impression, as communicated to Harrison Blake,[3] was this: "He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has seen. . . . A remarkably strong though coarse nature, of a sweet disposition, and

[1] See M. D. Conway's *Autobiography, Memories, and Experiences*, Boston, 1904.

[2] Later, however, like many other original enthusiasts, Bryant "shook his head." See Justin McCarthy's *Reminiscences*, vol. i, page 196.

[3] Thoreau's *Familiar Letters*, page 340.

much prized by his friends . . . He is very broad; but, as I have said, not fine. He said that I misapprehended him. I am not quite sure that I do." A later letter to Blake is well-known: [1] —

[TO HARRISON BLAKE.]

December 7 [1856].

That Walt Whitman, of whom I wrote to you, is the most interesting fact to me at present. I have just read his second edition (which he gave me), and it has done me more good than any reading for a long time. Perhaps I remember best the poem of Walt Whitman, an American, and the Sun-Down Poem. There are two or three pieces in the book which are disagreeable, to say the least; simply sensual. He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke. I think that men have not been ashamed of themselves without reason. No doubt there have always been dens where such deeds were unblushingly recited, and it is no merit to compete with their inhabitants. But even on this side he has spoken more truth than any American or modern that I know. I have found his poem exhilarating, encouraging. As for its sensuality, — and it may turn out to be less sensual than it appears, — I do not so much wish that those parts were not written, as that men and women

[1] Thoreau's *Familiar Letters*, page 345.

were so pure that they could read them without harm, that is, without understanding them. One woman told me that no woman could read it, — as if a man could read what a woman could not. Of course Walt Whitman can communicate to us no experience, and if we are shocked, whose experience is it that we are reminded of?

On the whole, it sounds to me very brave and American, after whatever deductions. I do not believe that all the sermons, so called, that have been preached in this land put together are equal to it for preaching.

We ought to rejoice greatly in him. He occasionally suggests something a little more than human. You can't confound him with the other inhabitants of Brooklyn or New York. How they must shudder when they read him! He is awfully good.

To be sure I sometimes feel a little imposed on. By his heartiness and broad generalities he puts me into a liberal frame of mind prepared to see wonders,— as it were, sets me upon a hill or in the midst of a plain,— stirs me well up, and then — throws in a thousand of brick. Though rude, and sometimes ineffectual, it is a great primitive poem, — an alarum or trumpet-note ringing through the American camp. Wonderfully like the Orientals, too, considering that when I

asked him if he had read them, he answered, "No: tell me about them."

I did not get far in conversation with him,— two more being present,— and among the few things which I chanced to say, I remember that one was, in answer to him as representing America, that I did not think much of America or of politics, and so on, which may have been somewhat of a damper to him.

Since I have seen him, I find that I am not disturbed by any brag or egoism in his book. He may turn out the least of a braggart of all, having a better right to be confident.

He is a great fellow.

Emerson had written in that same year to Carlyle: —

"One book, last summer, came out in New York, a nondescript monster, which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American — which I thought to send you; but the book throve so badly with the few to whom I showed it and wanted good morals so much, that I never did. Yet I believe now again, I shall. It is called Leaves of Grass — was written and printed by a journeyman printer in Brooklyn, New York, named Walter Whitman; and after you have looked into it, if you think, as you may, that it is only an auctioneer's inven-

tory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it." [1]

One fact seems to have impressed all these visitors. Instead of the "terrible eyes and buffalo strength" which might have been expected, they found a quiet, slow man, pleasant-voiced, reticent, studiously chaste in speech and modest of manner; a man, in short, as little like the "New York rowdy" of *Leaves of Grass* as could be imagined. Whitman welcomed his callers simply and heartily, listened to their conversation, and made no attempt to play the oracle himself. He seemed to possess unhindered leisure. His physical wants were of the simplest. He rose late, wrote or read as fancy led him, and often in the afternoon or evening crossed the ferry to New York, where he would ride hour after hour in his favorite seat on top of an omnibus, or linger in some Bohemian resort like Pfaff's, on Broadway, among a group of young newspaper men. He began now to have the satisfaction of being pointed out as the man who had written *Leaves of Grass*. He met new acquaintances genially, and borrowed money from them if he happened to need it, with the forgetful freedom of old comradeship. He persuaded one man of letters, then recently married, to intrust to him the whole of his small savings, which were straight-

[1] *Emerson-Carlyle Correspondence*, 1883, vol. ii, p. 25.

way lost in speculation. His friend brought suit to recover, but it was like trying to coin a vacuum. In such transactions poets are rarely at their best.[1]

At times Whitman elaborated various schemes for supporting himself by becoming an itinerant lecturer. The price of admission, as he first figured it, was to be fifteen cents. Afterward he lowered it to ten, but the scheme came to nothing. *An American Primer*,[2] a shrewd though unlearned inquiry into the æsthetic value of words, was to have been one of these lectures. He made many notes upon vocal culture and gesticulation, and upon the different styles requisite for popular success in different sections of the country. Fascinating as the function of the orator always was to him, it is scarcely conceivable that he would have been practically suited for such a rôle. His friends O'Connor and John Swinton used later to laugh at his attempts at declamation, because of his habit of constricting his throat and his artificial manner of recitation. His platform appearances, toward the end of his life, gave no evidence that he possessed the orator's gifts; his voice was then high and thin, and aside from his striking countenance, his audiences found him unimpressive.

To the born orator, the temper of the late fif-

[1] See Appendix.

[2] First published in *The Atlantic Monthly* for April, 1904.

ties would have been more hospitable than to the poet. A commercial panic startled the well-to-do from their security. Politics were a troubled stream, and the nation was drifting toward civil war. Upon some of the fundamental issues involved in that conflict Whitman had felt deeply and spoken freely in the past. He had deserted the Democratic party, had become a Free-Soiler and Abolitionist. Yet for half a dozen years after the spiritual excitement that resulted in *Leaves of Grass*, his mind dwelt almost wholly upon personal emotions and upon the larger relations of man with the universe. Politics went to the background of his attention until well after the opening of the War of the Rebellion. From 1857 to 1860 he continued to devote himself to perfecting his book, writing more than a hundred new poems, and altering the text and the order of those already issued. He composed, both now and later, with extreme care, and with an old typesetter's obstinacy regarding his own system of punctuation and capitalization. Frequently he prepared in advance long lists of synonyms and epithets likely to be useful in writing a specific poem, and his manuscripts show his unwearied endeavor to try one variant after another until his ear was satisfied. The two most important of the new groups of pieces were entitled "Enfans d'Adam" (later, "Child-

ren of Adam") and "Calamus." In the first of these groups he brought together, once for all, what he had to say upon the sex relations of men and women,— never afterward recurring to this vexed theme; in the second group, which remains one of the most difficult and mystical sections of his book, he expounds his theory of the friendship of men for men. He wrote, too, a prologue and epilogue for the whole volume, with a sort of architectonic endeavor like that cherished by Wordsworth in his scheme of the relation of "The Prelude" and "The Excursion" to "The Recluse."

By 1860 Whitman was again ready to seek a publisher, and he found a hospitable house in Boston,— that of Messrs. Thayer and Eldridge. They put their name upon the title-page, over the date 1860-61. The portrait used in the earlier edition was discarded in favor of a new engraving of the author, after a painting made by Charles Hine in 1859; and though the face is not wholly pleasing, there is less of that peculiar sensuality which makes the earlier portraits of Whitman repellent to many persons. The volume was a handsome one of 456 pages. Unfortunately, after four or five thousand copies had been sold, the plates passed into the hands of a New York publisher named Worthington, who printed many editions from them without paying copyright.

While the book was passing through the press Whitman stayed in Boston, where he made some warm friends. He arrived about the middle of March, 1860. In April *The Atlantic Monthly*, then under Lowell's editorship, printed his poem, "Bardic Symbols," afterward named "As I Ebbed with the Ocean of Life." It was unsigned, like all the contributions to the *Atlantic* in those days, but Whitman's authorship of it was easily recognizable. His publisher, C. W. Eldridge, a man of literary taste, became a lifelong admirer and correspondent. Eldridge's friend, W. D. O'Connor, then engaged in writing the novel *Harrington* for Thayer and Eldridge, met Whitman in the publisher's office, and laid the foundation of an intimacy which was to be renewed shortly at Washington, and which resulted later in his brilliant and famous pamphlet in Whitman's defence, entitled *The Good Gray Poet*. Another new friend was J. T. Trowbridge, the story-writer and poet, who has written a charming account of his first interview with Whitman.[1] He found a large, gray-haired and gray-bearded man reading proof sheets at a desk in a dingy office. Whitman's talk was disappointing at first, but on the next Sun-

[1] Published in *The Atlantic Monthly* for February, 1902, and afterward repeated in *My Own Story*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903.

day, at Trowbridge's house, he conversed freely, particularly upon his indebtedness to Emerson, who had helped him to "find himself." "I was simmering, simmering, simmering," he declared in a homely metaphor; "Emerson brought me to a boil." Emerson himself, who had already visited Whitman in Brooklyn, came repeatedly to see him. One well-known conversation between them has been preserved in a reminiscence of Boston Common written by Whitman in October, 1881:

"Up and down this breadth by Beacon Street, between these same old elms, I walk'd for two hours, of a bright sharp February mid-day twenty-one years ago, with Emerson, then in his prime, keen, physically and morally magnetic, arm'd at every point, and when he chose, wielding the emotional just as well as the intellectual. During those two hours he was the talker and I the listener. It was an argument-statement, *reconnoitring*, review, attack, and pressing home, (like an army corps in order, artillery, cavalry, infantry,) of all that could be said against that part (and a main part) in the construction of my poems, 'Children of Adam.' More precious than gold to me that dissertion — it afforded me, ever after, this strange and paradoxical lesson; each point of E.'s statement was unanswerable, no judge's charge ever more complete or convin-

cing, I could never hear the points better put — and then I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way. 'What have you to say then to such things?' said E., pausing in conclusion. 'Only that while I can't answer them at all, I feel more settled than ever to adhere to my own theory, and exemplify it,' was my candid response. Whereupon we went and had a good dinner at the American House. And thenceforward I never waver'd or was touch'd with qualms, (as I confess I had been two or three times before.)"[1]

Another Boston celebrity whom Emerson and Whitman have united to honor, and whom Whitman first heard at this time, was Father Taylor, the sailor preacher. Whitman went several times to hear him preach, was affected to tears by the old man's prayers, and thought him the "one essentially perfect orator" among all the eloquent men of that day. So passed the pleasant weeks of leisurely proof-reading and congenial companionship, until Whitman returned in June to New York.

In August Mr. Howells met him one evening at Pfaff's among the *Saturday Press* coterie, and has recorded[2] how Whitman "leaned back

[1] *Specimen Days*, p. 183.

[2] *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, p. 74.

in his chair and reached out his great hand to me as if he were going to give it to me for good and all. He had a fine head, with a cloud of Jovian hair upon it, and a branching beard and mustache, gentle eyes that looked most kindly into mine, and seemed to wish the liking which I instantly gave him, though we hardly passed a word, and our acquaintance was summed up in that glance and the grasp of his mighty fist upon my hand."

For the following year glimpses of Whitman are infrequent. In the spring of 1861 the war came; Messrs. Thayer and Eldridge could not collect their bills, and *Leaves of Grass* became for the third time a book without a publisher. For more than five years its author had been putting forth the best powers that lay in him, and the net result was that outside of a small group of ill-matched admirers, he was known to a few hundred people as a man who was said to have written a bizarre and indecent book. Yet he accepted with a tranquil patience, like that of the stage-drivers whom he loved, "good day's work and bad day's work" alike, and seemed, outwardly at least, to concern himself no longer with his literary reputation.

If he may be said to have had any regular occupation during 1860 and 1861 it was that of acting as a volunteer nurse to the sick and dis-

abled stage-drivers. Dr. D. B. St John Roosa, in 1860 a house surgeon of the old New York Hospital on Broadway, facing Pearl Street, wrote in 1896 an interesting account[1] of Whitman's services. The poet, scrupulously dressed in blue-flannel coat and vest, with gray, baggy trousers, and woolen shirt open at the throat, was freely admitted to the hospital. He was deeply moved by the sufferings of his disabled friends, and they, as well as the young doctors belonging to the house staff, found his presence restful and helpful. He talked much of books and poetry, but not about himself. When the doctors were off duty, he often went with them to Pfaff's, for a glass of beer. Smoking was then, as always, distasteful to him, but he would sit for hours with these young surgeons, listening to their talk, and then saunter back to the hospital and return tardily to his mother's house in Brooklyn. He was greatly changed, inwardly and outwardly, from the dapper young editor, with tall hat, light cane, and boutonnière, who had so light-heartedly promenaded Broadway, twenty years before.

[1] For the New York *Mail and Express*. It was copied in the Philadelphia *Telegraph* for June 30, 1896, and elsewhere.

CHAPTER IV

WAR-TIME

[1] "Those who joined the ranks and fought the battles of the Republic did well; but when the world knows, as it is beginning to know, how this man, without any encouragement from without, under no compulsion, simply, without beat of drum or any cheers of approval, went down into those immense lazar houses and devoted his days and nights, his heart and soul, and at last his health and life, to America's sick and wounded sons, it will say that he did even better."

R. M. Bucke.

With the bombardment of Fort Sumter, on April 12, 1861, began the Civil War. The news reached New York late at night. Whitman, who had been attending the opera in Fourteenth Street, was walking down Broadway about twelve o'clock, on his way back to Brooklyn, when he heard the cries of the newsboys with their extras. Securing a copy, he stepped into the brilliantly lighted Metropolitan Hotel to read it. A crowd gathered, listened in silence as some one read aloud the ominous dispatch, and as silently dispersed. The time for argument was over.

For the next eighteen months there is practically no record of Walt Whitman. His brother

George, who was ten years younger, enlisted promptly in the 51st New York Volunteers, largely a Brooklyn regiment. When the disastrous battle of Bull Run was fought in July, Walt was at home; and here he remained until George was wounded before Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December, 1862. That he was profoundly moved by the struggle is written clearly enough in *Drum-Taps*, — a volume of verse which was chiefly composed before the end of 1862, — and in many later prose memoranda.[1] Whether he thought at first of enlisting is not known. On April 10, 1864, when engaged in heroic service as a volunteer nurse for soldiers, he wrote to his mother: "The war must be carried on, and I could willingly go myself in the ranks if I thought it would profit more than at present, and I don't know sometimes, but I shall as it is." No criticism of Whitman is more short-sighted than that which has condemned him for not personally shouldering a musket. That he had strength, courage, and patriotism, he amply proved, upon a field far more terrible

[1] In H. B. Binns's *Walt Whitman*, p. 181, there is printed, from the Harned MSS., a vow written in Whitman's note-book on April 16, 1861: "I have this day, this hour, resolved to inaugurate for myself a pure, perfect, sweet, clean-blooded robust body, by ignoring all drinks but water and pure milk, and all fat meats, late suppers — a great body, a purged, cleansed, spiritualized, invigorated body."

than that of actual battle. But he had not "a warlike nature," — as Goethe quietly said of himself when reproached with not emulating Körner. It is inconceivable that he could have made an effective soldier. The requisite obedience, swiftness of action, effacement of personal conviction, were not in him. His "call," as his Quaker forbears would have said, was to save life rather than to take it. So, through the

"Year that trembled and reel'd beneath me,"

Whitman tarried with his mother, visiting his sick stage-drivers, reading the bulletins from the front, and describing in passionate verse the troops that marched proudly southward through Manhattan to preserve the old Union of the States.

It was late in the second year of the war that the Whitmans, then living on Portland Avenue, Brooklyn, were startled by the news that George had been seriously wounded in an engagement of December 13th. Walt immediately left for the front. His pocket was picked in Philadelphia, and he arrived in Washington without a dime. Here he lost two anxious days seeking information and assistance. Luckily he ran across his Boston friend, W. D. O'Connor, who had become a clerk in the Light-House Bureau. O'Connor, remarking cheerfully that a pick-

pocket who could n't rob Walt ought to be ashamed of himself, helped the poet on his way. On the 19th he reached the camp of the 51st New York at Falmouth, Virginia, opposite Fredericksburg and about fifty miles from Washington. George, a silent, tough-fibred captain of infantry, was already out of danger. Walt telegraphed the good news home, and spent the next eight or nine days among the homesick and uncomfortably quartered troops. Their sufferings affected him deeply, and returning to Washington in company with some of the wounded and penniless, he could not make up his mind to leave them.

Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor hospitably offered him a room in their house, 394 L Street, near Fourteenth. Major Hapgood, an army paymaster, — whose temporary clerk was C. W. Eldridge, the now bankrupt publisher of the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, — at once gave Whitman a desk in his office, with two or three hours' work a day in copying documents. In a few days he felt settled for an indefinite stay, and began to write long letters home about his "poor fellows" in the hospitals. He corresponded, too, with Brooklyn and New York papers, and did a little hack work for the local press. By February he secured letters to Seward, Chase, Sumner, and other political leaders, in

the hope of getting an office that would adequately support him; but he hesitated, without backing of some sort, to present his letters to Seward and Chase, and though Sumner "talked and acted as though he had life in him," [1] it was two years before anything came of it. In March his mind seemed to go back wistfully to the manuscripts he had left in Brooklyn. "Mother," [2] he writes, "when you or Jeff write again, tell me if my papers and MSS. are all right; I should be very sorry indeed if they got scattered or used up or anything — especially the copy of *Leaves of Grass* covered in blue paper, and the little MS. book *Drum Taps*, and the MS. tied up in the square, spotted (stone-paper) loose covers — I want them all carefully kept."

But writing was, for the present, thrust to the background. During these early months of 1863 Washington had become a huge hospital where more than fifty thousand sick and wounded soldiers were suffering. Public buildings like the Patent Office, and even at times the Capitol, were pressed into service. There were more than a dozen great hospital barracks in the city itself; one of the largest being the Armory Square hospital, near the present site of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. Rude convalescent camps dot-

[1] Letter of W. to "Jeff," Feb. 13, 1863.
[2] March 31, 1863.

ted the barren slopes beyond the city limits. The army surgeons and nurses did their best, but their resources were constantly over-taxed. The situation was appalling. And here Whitman showed his noblest traits of character. Beginning with the Brooklyn boys whom he knew, he set out daily, on his own responsibility, to minister to the wounded. A natural nurse, and aided by his experience in visiting the sick in the old New York Hospital, he perceived at once the opportunity for countless services for which the professional nurses had neither the time, the tact, nor the loving interest in individuals.[1] He recognized no difference now between Rebels and Federals. He wrote last messages for the dying, and letters to sweethearts. For those who were able to write for themselves, he left paper and stamped envelopes. From the haversack which he carried on his daily and nightly rounds, he would take an orange, an apple, some lemons, a portion of tobacco, or some cheerful reading matter, and distribute them as there was need. Kindly people in Brooklyn, Boston, Salem, Providence, — among them James Redpath, Emer-

[1] See Whitman's letters to the N. Y. *Times*, February 26, 1863; Brooklyn *Eagle*, March 19, 1863; and *Times*, Dec. 11, 1864. These, together with Whitman's letters in war-time to his mother, published under the title of "The Wound Dresser," are printed in Volume VII of the Camden Edition.

son,[1] and Wendell Phillips, — sent him small sums of money for the most destitute soldiers. He had not much to give, at best, but he gave it with a loving word or look or caress, and passed on. Sometimes he would stay to read aloud, or to start the game of Twenty Questions. With the more critical cases he would sit for hours, soothing and cheering the tormented body with his calm, wholesome physical presence, and comforting the soul with tender sympathy. One of his letters to his mother, in the homely language which he always used to her, describes a typical incident. It has frequently been quoted: —

"This afternoon, July 22d, I have spent a long time with Oscar F. Wilber, Company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhœa and a bad wound also. He asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and ask'd him what I should read. He said, 'Make your own choice.' I open'd at the close of one of the first books of the evangelists, and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ, and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man ask'd me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased

[1] See the letters printed in T. Donaldson's *Walt Whitman, the Man*. New York, 1896.

him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He ask'd me if I enjoy'd religion. I said 'Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, may-be, it is the same thing.' He said, 'It is my chief reliance.' He talked of death, and said he did not fear it. I said 'Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?' He said 'I may, but it is not probable.' He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad, it discharg'd much. Then the diarrhœa had prostrated him, and I felt he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he return'd fourfold. He gave me his mother's address, Mrs. Sally D. Wilber, Alleghany Post Office, Cattaraugus County, N. Y. I had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described."

His working theory he described as "conscientious personal investigation of cases, each for itself; with sharp, critical faculties, but in the fullest spirit of human sympathy and boundless love." He believed that the mere presence of a strong, generous-souled man or woman, sending out invisible currents of affection, was better for the sick than any medicine. And many a hard-headed army surgeon, who closely watched the benignant gray-haired poet as he went his rounds, thought that he was right.

Months passed before he began to feel the daily drafts upon his splendid vitality. In the presence of death and dreadful operations he was able, he wrote his mother, to "keep singularly cool; but often hours afterwards, perhaps when I am home or out walking alone, I feel sick and actually tremble when I recall the thing and have it in my mind again before me." By May the wounded from the bloody battle of Chancellorsville were brought to Washington, sometimes at the rate of a thousand men a day, and the doctors cautioned Whitman about remaining too steadily in the air of the hospitals. But he determined to stay with his boys through the heated term. In July came the battle of Gettysburg. His hospitable friends, the O'Connors, moved to another house, but Walt lingered for a time in his tiny third-story room, getting his own breakfast, and buying one other meal a day at a restaurant. He was spending upon the sick every penny he could save. The old dream of making money by lecturing recurred again, but even he could see that it was an unpropitious time.

The heat that summer grew terrific. Once in a while Whitman had a glimpse of Lincoln, who was staying by his post. "He looks more careworn even than usual," he wrote, "his face with deep cut lines, seams, and his *complexion gray*

through very dark skin — a curious looking man, very sad." In August Whitman's letters to his mother betrayed an unusual depression: "I believe there is not much but trouble in this world, and if one has n't any for himself he has it made up by having it brought close to him through others, and that is sometimes worse than to have it touch one's self." His brother Andrew was seriously ill. "Jeff," who now had young children of his own, and was supporting the aged mother, was likely to be drafted for service. These home anxieties pressed upon Walt, and his tender heart revolted from the daily sight of the aftermath of war. "Mother, one's heart grows sick of war, after all, when you see what it really is; every once in a while I feel so horrified and disgusted — it seems to me like a great slaughter-house and the men mutually butchering each other — then I feel how impossible it appears, again, to retire from this contest, until we have carried our points (it is cruel to be so tossed from pillar to post in one's judgment)."

So the months dragged by until October. He moved into new quarters, a garret room in a shabby tenement at 456 Sixth Street. He began to hunger for a sight of his mother. He had no money for the journey, but John Hay — then twenty-five, Lincoln's private secretary, and an admirer of *Leaves of Grass* — quietly arranged

for his transportation, as the following note shows: —

Executive Mansion, Washington, October 9, 1863.

My dear O'Connor, — If you will come over to me I can arrange that matter for you.

Yours truly,

John Hay.[1]

Whitman stayed in Brooklyn about a month. He found his mother in good heart, but the life of cities seemed less satisfactory than of old. A new wave of creative impulse arose within him, and he felt once more that his true, if brief, vocation was that of a poet. Here is a striking letter to Charles W. Eldridge, hitherto unprinted: —

Brooklyn,
Nov. 17, 1863.

Dear friend,

I suppose Nelly has received a letter from me posting you up of my doings, &c. Any letters that come to me, up to Saturday next, please send on here. After that, do not send any, as I shall return Monday or Tuesday next. The weather here the last three days is very unpleasant, sloppy and thick. I was at the opera last night, Trovatore — very, very good singing & acting.

[1] This note is endorsed in pencil by O'Connor: "*Rel. getting ticket to N. Y. for W. W.*"

I feel to devote myself more and more to the work of my life, which is making poems. I must bring out Drum Taps. I *must* be continually bringing out poems — now is the hey day — I shall range along the high plateau of my life and capacity for a few years now, & then swiftly descend. The life here in the cities, & the objects, &c of most, seem to me very flippant and shallow somehow since I returned this time. . . . My New York boys are good, too good — if I staid here a month longer I should be killed with kindness. The great recompense of my journey here is to see my mother so well, & so bravely sailing on amid my troubles and discouragements like a noble old ship. My brother Andrew is bound for another world — he is here the greater part of the time. Charley I think sometimes to be a woman is greater than to be a man — is more eligible to greatness, not the ostensible article, but the real one. Dear Comrade I send you my love & to William & Nelly & remember me to Major.

WALT.

Early in December he was back in his Washington garret. Andrew died just after his return, and Walt was homesick, but he took up again at once his volunteer task of nursing. J. T. Trowbridge, for that month a guest in the mansion

of Secretary Chase, diagonally opposite to Whitman's tenement, has given a vivid account of his visits to Walt and his endeavors to serve him.[1] Finding that Whitman still possessed Emerson's letters of recommendation to Sumner and Chase, — now nearly a year old,— Trowbridge urged upon the great Secretary Walt's claim to an appointment. But Chase thought he ought not to appoint to office a man who had written a "notorious" book; and there the matter ended, Chase keeping Emerson's letter for the sake of the autograph. Whitman had already been reading aloud from his *Drum-Taps* MSS. to Trowbridge, who, upon his return to Boston, tried in vain to find a publisher for the volume.

Driven by curiosity to see what was going on at the front, and thinking that he could be as useful there as at Washington, Whitman spent a few days in February, 1864, at Culpeper, Va. A letter[2] to Trowbridge gives his impressions: —

CULPEPPER VA
Feb 8 1864

DEAR FRIEND

I ought to have written to you before, acknowledging the good package of books, duly rec'd by express, & actively used since, changing

[1] *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1902. Also printed in Trowbridge's *My Own Story*. [2] Hitherto unprinted.

them around in places where most needed among the soldiers — (I found a small hospital of U S teamsters, entirely without reading, I go there considerable, & have given them largely of your reading contribution) — I am down here pretty well toward the extreme front of the Army, eight or ten miles south of headquarters (Brandy Station) — We had some fighting here (below here on picket lines) day before yesterday — We feared they the rebs were advancing upon us in our depleted condition, especially feared their making a flank movement up on our right. — We were all ready to skedaddle from here last night & expected it — horses harnessed in all directions, & traps packed up, (we have held & lost Culpepper three or four times already) — but I was very sleepy & laid down & went to sleep never slept fresher or sweeter — but orders came during the night to stay for the present, there was no danger — during the night I heard tremendous yells, I got up & went out, & found it was some of the men returning from the extreme front — as day before yesterday a strong force, three corps, were moved down there — there were portions of them now returning — it was a curious sight to see the shadowy columns coming in two or three o'clock at night — I talked with the men — how good, how cheerful, how full of manliness & good nature our Amer-

ican young men are — I staid last night at the house of a real secesh woman Mrs. Ashby — her husband (dead) a near relation of the famous reb Gen Ashby — she gave me a good supper & bed — there was quite a squad of our officers there — she & her sister paid me the compliment of talking friendlily & nearly altogether exclusively with me — she was dressed in very faded clothes but her manners were fine seems to be a traveled educated woman — quite melancholy — said she had remained through fearful troubles & changes here on acct of her children — she is a handsome, middle-aged woman — poor lady, how I pitied her, compelled to live as one may say on chance & charity, with her high spirit.

Dear friend I am moving around here among the field hospitals — (O how the poor young men suffer)— & to see more of camp life and war scenes, & the state of the army this winter — Dear friend I have much to tell you, but must abruptly close

WALT WHITMAN

Write to me same address Washington, D C — has Caleb Babbitt gone home from Mason Hospital — I left the book at Mr Chase's

J. T. TROWBRIDGE,
Somerville, Massachusetts.

In the following month Grant was made commander-in-chief, and the war entered upon what proved to be its final period. "Grant is here. We expect fighting before long," Whitman wrote to his mother. The Army of the Potomac broke camp, and the campaign of the "Wilderness" began. "Others may say what they like," Walt wrote in April, "I believe in Grant and in Lincoln, too." The hospitals in Washington became more crowded than ever, and the Whitmans were sorely anxious over George, whose regiment was now doing some of Grant's kind of fighting. On May 20th, Walt, who had moved his quarters to a third story hall bedroom at 502 Pennsylvania Avenue, "a miserable place," wrote to Trowbridge: —

WASHINGTON
May 20 1864

DEAR FRIEND

Your welcome gift of money for wounded here ($5) came safe to-day & is most acceptable — Most of wounded brought up here now are without a cent — Many of the cases appeal very strongly — (I sometimes think only one going among the men as I do, with personal feeling & my own way of investigation understands how deep & what sort the appeal is) — the hospitals are very full — Armory Square has more inmates than many a well known New England

village — I go as usual to one or another hospital & to Alexandria, day & night — Dear friend, I shall always be glad to hear from you — Should you find any you know who are able & who feel to aid the wounded, through me, it would come *very acceptable now* — sure to reach addressed

WALT WHITMAN
Care Major Hapgood
Paymaster U S Army
Washington
D C

J T TROWBRIDGE
Somerville
Massachusetts

Less than a month thereafter, Whitman's hitherto perfect health gave way, never to be wholly restored. A few sentences, from successive letters to his mother, tell the story: —

"Mother, if this campaign was not in progress I should not stop here, as it is now beginning to tell a little upon me, so many bad wounds, many putrefied, and all kinds of dreadful ones, I have been rather too much with."

"I believe I am homesick — something new for me — then I have seen all the horrors of soldiers' life and not been kept up by its excitement . . ."

"Mother, I have not felt well at all the last

week. I had spells of deathly faintness and bad trouble in my head too."

"The doctor tells me I have continued too long in the hospitals, especially in a bad place, Armory building, where the worst wounds were, and have absorbed too much of the virus in my system."

"I find it worse than I calculated."

"The doctors have told me for a fortnight I must leave; that I need an entire change of air, etc. I think I shall come home for a short time, and pretty soon."

Returning to Brooklyn, Whitman remained there, slowly gaining strength, for the next six months. As cold weather came on he began to visit the military hospitals in and near New York. The *Times* for December 11 contained a long-delayed letter describing his Washington experiences. He wrote frequently to O'Connor and to Eldridge, telling of his progress toward recovery, and making frequent mention of *Drum-Taps*: "I intend to move heaven and earth to publish my Drum-Taps as soon as I am able to go around." The most interesting of these letters is dated on January 6, 1865.[1] The opening paragraph refers to a new application for office, which was shortly to prove successful.

[1] I am indebted to Mrs. Ellen M. Calder, formerly Mrs. W. D. O'Connor, for this and many other unpublished letters to and from O'Connor.

Brooklyn, January 6, 1865.

Dear friend:

Your welcome letter of December 30th came safe. I have written and sent my application to Mr. Otto and also a few lines to Mr. Ashton with a copy of it. I am most desirous to get the appointment as enclosing with the rest of the points, my attention to the soldiers and to my poems, as you intimate.

It may be Drum Taps may come out this winter yet (in the way I have mentioned in times past). It is in a state to put right through, a perfect copy being ready for the printer. I feel at last, and for the first time without any demur, that I am satisfied with it — content to have it go to the world verbatim and punctuatim. It is in my opinion superior to Leaves of Grass — certainly more perfect as a work of art, being adjusted in all its proportions and its passion having the indispensable merit that though to the ordinary reader let loose with wildest abandon, the true artist can see that it is yet under control. But I am perhaps mainly satisfied with Drum Taps because it delivers my ambition of the task that has haunted me, namely, to express in a poem (and in the way I like, which is not at all by directly stating it), the pending action of this *Time and Land we swim in*, with all their large conflicting fluctuations of despair and hope,

the shiftings, masses, and the whirl and deafening din, (yet over all, as by invisible hand, a definite purport and idea) with the unprecedented anguish of wounded and suffering, the beautiful young men in wholesale death and agony, everything sometimes as if blood-color and dripping blood. The book is therefore unprecedentedly sad (as these days are, are they not?), but it also has the blast of the trumpet and the drum pounds and whirrs in it, and then an undertone of sweetest comradeship and human love threads its steady thread inside the chaos and is heard at every lull and interstice thereof. Truly also, it has clear notes of faith and triumph.

Drum Taps has none of the perturbations of Leaves of Grass. I am satisfied with Leaves of Grass (by far the most of it) as expressing what was intended, namely, to express by sharp-cut self-assertion, *One's-Self*, and also, or may be, still more, to map out, to throw together for American use, a gigantic embryo or skeleton of Personality, fit for the West, for native models: but there are a few things I shall carefully eliminate in the next issue and a few more I shall considerably change.

I see I have said I consider Drum taps superior to Leaves of Grass. I probably mean [1] as a piece of art and from the more simple and

[1] ("Is n't this deliciously characteristic of Wally!!" W. D. O'C.)

winning nature of the subject and also because I have in it only, succeeded to my satisfaction in removing all superfluity — verbal superfluity, I mean. I delight to make a poem where I feel clear that not a word but is an indispensable part thereof and of my meaning.

Still Leaves of Grass is dear to me, always dearest to me as my first-born, as daughter of my life's first hopes, doubts, and the putting in form of those days efforts and aspirations. True, I see now some things in it I should not put in if I were to write now, but yet I shall certainly let them stand, even if but for proofs of phases passed away.[1] . . .

A month later he was writing to Trowbridge from Washington: —

WASHINGTON, Monday,
February 6, 1865

MY DEAR FRIEND:

As you see by the date of this, I am back again in Washington, moving around regularly, but not to excess, among the hospitals. . . . My health is pretty good, but since I was prostrated last July, I have not had that unconscious and perfect health I formerly had. The physician says my system has been penetrated by the ma-

[1] ("This is all about the book. The rest of the letter is family affairs, &c." W. D. O'C.)

laria, — it is tenacious, peculiar and somewhat baffling — but tells me it will go over in due time. It is my first appearance in the character of a man not entirely well. . . .

This was a happy month for Whitman. George, who had been for some time a prisoner of war, was exchanged, and then came the long-deferred appointment for Walt himself, to a clerkship in the Indian Bureau, in the Department of the Interior. He writes to Trowbridge on March 3 : —

"I believe I told you I was working a few hours a day, a sufficiently remunerative desk in the Indian Office — I spend a couple of hours day or evening in the hospitals."

The next day Lincoln took the oath of office for the second time. Whitman saw him driving from the Capitol. "He was in his plain two-horse barouche, and look'd very much worn and tired ; the lines, indeed, of vast responsibilities, intricate questions and demands of life and death, cut deeper than ever upon his dark brown face ; yet all the old goodness, tenderness, sadness and canny shrewdness, underneath the furrows."

It was the last time, apparently, that he looked upon Lincoln's face. The two men had never spoken. Returning to Brooklyn for a few weeks to make final arrangements for printing *Drum-*

Taps at his own expense, Whitman was at home with his mother when the news came on the morning of April 15 that the President had been shot the night before.

"Mother prepared breakfast — and other meals afterward — as usual; but not a mouthful was eaten all day by either of us. We each drank half a cup of coffee; that was all. Little was said. We got every newspaper morning and evening, and the frequent extras of that period, and pass'd them silently to each other."

It was lilac-time in the straggling, half-rural Brooklyn streets, and the sight and odor of the blossoms were at once and forever associated, in Whitman's mind, with the tragedy. The first edition of *Drum-Taps*[1] was already printing, but Whitman began immediately to compose the Lincoln dirge "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloomed," as well as the briefer lyric upon the dead leader, entitled "O Captain! My Captain." These, with a few other less notable pieces, formed the *Sequel to Drum-Taps*,[2] which was separately printed, but is often bound with the unsold copies of the first edition.

This book fitly summarizes the profound im-

[1] *Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps*, New York, 1865.

[2] *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (Since the preceding came from the press), *When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd and Other Poems*, Washington, 1865–66.

pression made upon Whitman's mind by the long conflict. As we have seen, it was eighteen months after the war began before he went to Washington. For two periods of a few days each he was at the front, though he saw no actual fighting. Previous to April, 1865, he had spent about twenty months, all told, in daily ministrations to the sick, utilizing all the time and strength that remained to him after the hours of hack work by which he had earned a wretched living. During this period he made, according to his own diaries, about six hundred visits to the hospitals, and ministered to between eighty and a hundred thousand sick and wounded. But all such figures fail to show the terrible drama of hopes, fears, and sorrows which he witnessed at close view, and in which he personally shared. "The real war," as he himself said, "will never get in the books." Yet Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps* embody the very spirit of the civil conflict, picturing war with a poignant realism, a terrible and tender beauty, such as only the great masters of literature have been able to compass.

Here the reader may still feel the electric shock of that first alarm, as the drums and bugles sound; the ideal passion for the Flag; the sinewy tread of the volunteer soldiery, moving so majestically that it seems as if Democracy, or even

Mankind itself, were rising from its lethargy. Here are the pictured march and fight: the cavalry crossing the ford, the crashing and smoking artillery, the bivouac, the field hospital at night, the vigil, and the gaunt, ivory faces of the dead. There is no sectional anger or hatred, but rather a prophecy, even in the midst of carnage, of an ultimate reconciliation and comradeship. Yet in the meantime the tragic penalty must be paid in full, and paid by the innocent; the homely pathos of "Come up from the fields, Father" is such that no American with a memory can read it without tears. Most of the poems in *Drum-Taps* are brief, restrained, and subdued to a rhythmical — sometimes even a metrical — regularity unusual in Whitman's verse. "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors," and "O Captain! My Captain!" are almost conventional in their structure; and the latter, on this account, has had a wide popularity among readers who are indifferent to Whitman's other and more characteristic productions. For solemnity and power no poem in the little volume is comparable to the threnody, "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd," which Swinburne, under the spell of his first enthusiasm for Whitman, called "the most sonorous nocturn ever chanted in the church of the world." The lilacs of April, the star drooping in the west, the hermit-thrush singing

in the cedar swamp, are the three *motifs* of the dirge : —

"Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul."

It remains, with Lowell's *Commemoration Ode*, as the finest imaginative product of the Civil War period. Never but once before, in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and never afterward, was Whitman capable of such sustained and deep-toned recitative, varied with lyric interludes of such pure beauty. The grief at the passing of the great President becomes ennobled and transfigured into a song of praise : —

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love — but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

CHAPTER V

THE CLERK AND HIS FRIENDS

"Well, I read your poet and his praises, and I mention him in places where his name was never heard, and I argue and assert, and defy, and declaim, — and if I do not wholly convert myself, I do at least open some generous minds to consider. I watch the fight in England with curious interest." — GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS *to W. D. O'Connor, October 3, 1867.*

THE close of the war brought no immediate changes into Whitman's life. For many months the calls to hospital service seemed as compelling as ever, and he continued his visitations. But little by little the strain relaxed, until at last he found himself bound to only a few convalescents, whom he used to visit on Sunday afternoons. For the Sunday dinner or tea he was a frequent guest at the friendly table of the O'Connors, who had shown unfailing kindness since his arrival in Washington, penniless and distressed, in December of 1862. O'Connor was then thirty, — "a gallant, handsome, gay-hearted, fine-voiced, glowing-eyed man; lithe-moving on his feet, of healthy and magnetic atmosphere and presence, and the most welcome

company in the world." [1] His ambitious novel, *Harrington*, which Thayer and Eldridge had published in 1860, had proved a practical failure, and he was burying his brilliant talents in the routine work of his clerkship, first in the Light-House Bureau, and afterward in the Life-Saving Service, of which he was assistant superintendent at the time of his death, in 1889.[2] O'Connor was a wide reader, and had the Irish gift of ready, eloquent speech.[3] His charming wife [4] used to mend Whitman's socks, and tended him during all the months that he stayed under their roof, as a mother might her big, dreamy, careless boy. A "superb woman" he called her in 1888, "without shams, brags: just a woman. Ellen does not write: that gives her more time to get at the essentials of life."

At the O'Connors' Whitman often met Charles Eldridge, the unlucky publisher, who after ending his clerkship under Paymaster Hapgood, secured a place in the Internal Revenue office: "a

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 511.

[2] A volume of tales of rescue, compiled by C. W. Eldridge from O'Connor's annual Reports, was published in Boston, 1904, under the title *Heroes of the Storm*.

[3] A lifelong friend of O'Connor writes me: "He was a man of full and rich attainments, and a genius — needing only a brake on his prodigal and affluent expression. He gave up the better part of his career to Whitman — whom he excelled in humanity, aspiration, and self-surrender."

[4] Now Mrs. Ellen M. Calder.

thoroughly good and true man — has some ways and notions of his own, but the main things are as *solid* as the hills." [1] Hither, too, came E. C. Stedman, already editor and war correspondent, and later to be known as banker, poet, man of letters, and one of Whitman's most sane and illuminating critics.

John Burroughs was another member of the kindly little circle of Government employés. A farmer's son, he had published at twenty-three an unsigned *Atlantic* essay on "Expression" which was widely attributed to Emerson, in whose writings he had steeped himself. In 1863, at twenty-six, he had taught school, tried his hand at journalism, and settled in Washington as a clerk in the Treasury. He had already received from *Leaves of Grass* such an impression as no other book had ever made on him. Rambling in the woods near Washington one Sunday afternoon, he encountered Whitman, who, with his haversack slung over his shoulder, was tramping off to an outlying hospital. Burroughs joined him, and a friendship began which ended only with Whitman's life. In the easy-going years that followed the war, Walt frequently breakfasted on Sundays with Mr. and Mrs. Burroughs; invariably arriving late, to the housekeeper's distress, but bringing such radiant good spirits with him that he was invariably forgiven.

[1] "Calamus," Camden Edition, vol. viii, p. 112.

Contrasting sharply with these friendships for book-loving persons was Whitman's intimacy with Peter Doyle. Doyle still survives, a big, warm-hearted Irishman, baggage-master on the Colonial and Federal express from Washington to Boston. The son of a blacksmith in Alexandria, Peter was but eighteen in 1865. The close of the war found him a Confederate prisoner on parole in Washington, and earning two dollars a day as conductor of a horsecar. As Whitman was returning from John Burroughs's house, one stormy night, in Doyle's car, a sudden impulse led the young conductor to sit down by his solitary passenger. Each was lonely, and each understood without words the other's craving for friendship. For the next half-dozen years they were almost daily companions in leisure hours. At night they would tramp the country roads, while Whitman talked about the stars or spouted Shakespeare. The minor conventions had no terrors for this pair. "We would tackle the farmers who came into town, buy a water-melon, sit down on the cellar-door of Bacon's grocery, Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue, halve it and eat it. People would go by and laugh. Walt would only smile and say, 'They can have the laugh — we have the melon.'"[1] Doyle's testi-

[1] Preface to *Calamus*. Edited by R. M. Bucke. Boston, Laurens Maynard, 1897.

mony as to Whitman's habits is conclusive for this period. "I never knew a case of Walt's being bothered up by a woman. Woman in that sense never came into his head. Walt was too clean, he hated anything which was not clean. No trace of any kind of dissipation in him. I ought to know about him those years — we were awful close together. . . . He had pretty vigorous ideas on religion . . . he never went to church — did n't like form, ceremonies — did n't seem to favor preachers at all. I asked him about the hereafter, 'There must be something,' he said. 'There can't be a locomotive unless there is somebody to run it.' I have heard him say that if a person was the right kind of person — and I guess he thought all persons right kind of persons — he could n't be destroyed in the next world nor in this." [1]

Whitman's letters to this loyal, loving young Irishman have been reprinted under the title *Calamus*. Better than any far-fetched theorizing, they expound Whitman's doctrine of manly friendship, as laid down in the "Calamus" group of his poems. No series of Walt's letters, except those written to his mother, so thoroughly reveal the simple affection which furnished the basis of his far from simple character. It was natural to him to spend long hours with a wholesome illit-

[1] *Ibid.*

erate boy whom he liked. It was instinctive — however affected or mawkish it might be in another — to address Peter Doyle as "dear baby," "dearest boy," "my darling son." To sit with Pete on the shady side of Pennsylvania Avenue, cutting a watermelon and smiling back at the smiling passers-by, was Whitman's version of

> "A book of Verses underneath the Bough,
> A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread — and Thou
> Beside me singing in the Wilderness —
> Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!"

And Paradise for Paradise, it is not clear that Omar had the better of it.

To expect that a poet should be always "literary," or desirous of literary company, is to betray a singular ignorance of that irritable tribe. Many of Whitman's daily companions, in the years of his clerkship, refused — as, indeed, many persons still refuse — to consider him a poet at all. His home was now in a pleasant boarding-house at M and Twelfth streets, which sheltered several young men of a literary turn of mind. They frequently discussed their fellow boarder. One of the survivors of this group notes:[1] "We did not think very highly of his writings and found in them more matter for amusement than for instruction. *But we all*

[1] Thomas Proctor, in *The Journal of Hygiene*, February, 1898.

liked the man. . . . He seldom started any topic, hardly ever led, and was never obtrusive. . . . He never complained of feeling ill or out of sorts. . . . He used no tobacco or wine. . . . He was always chaste in speech, and that he was a clean man physically and morally was the impression he made on the minds of all of us. . . . I never saw him engaged in reading, or have any literature in his possession, not even a newspaper. . . . Leisureliness in everything was one of his striking characteristics. Some of us thought that he was physically lazy and mentally hazy." It may be added that the author of these reminiscences, receiving from Whitman in 1868 the gift of an autographed copy of *Drum-Taps*, did not take the trouble to open the book for the next thirty years.

But the agreeable routine of the first summer of Whitman's clerkship was rudely interrupted. His work in the Indian Bureau had never been arduous, and he some times worked at his desk upon a copy of the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which he was slowly revising for a new edition. Some one called the attention of the chief of the department to the fact that the gray-haired clerk was the author and possessor of an immoral book. It was taken from his desk after office hours, and examined by the Secretary. The result was the following note.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
WASHINGTON, D. C., June 30th, 1865.

The services of Walter Whitman, of New York, as a clerk in the Indian Office, will be dispensed with from and after this date.

JAS. HARLAN,
Secretary of the Interior.

Harlan, an able lawyer and former United States Senator, who had once served for two years as president of Iowa Wesleyan University, was probably within his technical privilege [1] in dismissing Whitman, whatever may be thought of searching a clerk's desk in his absence. But his action was certainly narrow-minded and unjust. To the protest of one of Whitman's friends, J. H. Ashton, then assistant in the Attorney-General's office, Harlan angrily replied that he would himself resign before reinstating the clerk. Whereupon Ashton quietly secured for Whitman a clerkship in the Attorney-General's office, and the incident was apparently closed. Outside of a dozen friendly newspaper men, few people in Washington heard or cared about Whitman's trouble with his chief. But to the chivalrous William O'Connor, what had happened was not

[1] In a letter written in 1894, Mr. Harlan said that Whitman was dismissed "*on the ground that his services were not needed.* And no other reason was ever assigned by my authority." See Mr. Leon Vincent's *American Literary Masters*, p. 488.

only an insult to his friend, but an outrage upon the Liberty of Literature. For nine weeks O'Connor nursed his wrath, and then, with a pamphlet whose very title, *The Good Gray Poet*, [1] was a stroke of genius, he rode into the lists against the Secretary. In the whole history of literary controversy there have been few more brilliant pamphlets. He begins by describing Whitman's personal appearance upon the streets of Washington, and how Lincoln, seeing him for the first time, said in his quaint, sweet tone, "Well, *he* looks like a MAN!" Then follows a depiction of Whitman's character, and the circumstances of his dismissal. Admitting that some eighty lines out of a total of about nine thousand published by Whitman might be objectionable to a "malignant virtue," O'Connor passes in swift survey the work of the world's most famous writers, and finds that none of them escape the same indictment. The debased taste of the nineteenth century would "expurgate" them all.

No extracts do justice to the sustained heat and glow of O'Connor's rhetoric, but the twentieth century reader may be interested in his

[1] Dated September 2, 1865, but published with the imprint "New York: Bunce and Huntington, 1866." It was afterward reprinted, with some changes, in R. M. Bucke's *Walt Whitman*, New York, 1883.

picture of the colonialism of all American literature except *Leaves of Grass.*

"Every other book by an American author implies, both in form and substance, I cannot even say the European, but the British mind. The shadow of Temple Bar and Arthur's Seat lies dark on all our letters. Intellectually, we are still a dependency of Great Britain, and one word — colonial — comprehends and stamps our literature. In no literary form, except our newspapers, has there been anything distinctively American. I note our best books — the works of Jefferson, the romances of Brockden Brown, the speeches of Webster, Everett's rhetoric, the divinity of Channing, some of Cooper's novels, the writings of Theodore Parker, the poetry of Bryant, the masterly law arguments of Lysander Spooner, the miscellanies of Margaret Fuller, the histories of Hildreth, Bancroft and Motley, Ticknor's History of Spanish Literature, the political treatises of Calhoun, the rich, benignant poems of Longfellow, the ballads of Whittier, the delicate songs of Philip Pendleton Cooke, the weird poetry of Edgar Poe, the wizard tales of Hawthorne, Irving's Knickerbocker, Delia Bacon's splendid sibyllic book on Shakespeare, the political economy of Carey, the prison letters and immortal speech of John Brown, the lofty patrician eloquence of Wendell

Phillips, and those diamonds of the first water, the great clear essays and greater poems of Emerson. This literature has often commanding merits, and much of it is very precious to me; but in respect of its national character, all that can be said is that it is tinged, more or less deeply, with America; and the foreign model, the foreign standards, the foreign culture, the foreign ideas, dominate over it all."

Then follows a long and moving description of Whitman's services in the hospitals, closing with this passage: —

"Not for him, perhaps, the recognition of his day and generation. But a life and deeds like his, lightly esteemed by men, seek deep into the memory of Man. Great is the stormy fight of Zutphen; it is the young lion of English Protestantism springing in haughty fury for the defence of the Netherlands from the bloody ravin of Spain; but Philip Sidney passing the flask of water from his own lips to the dying soldier looms gigantic, and makes all the foreground of its noble purpose and martial rage; and whatever may be the verdict of the present, sure am I that hereafter and to the latest ages, when Bull Run and Shiloh and Port Hudson, when Vicksburg and Stone River and Fort Donelson, when Pea Ridge and Chancellorsville and Gettysburg and the Wilderness, and the

great march from Atlanta to Savannah, and Richmond rolled in flame, and all the battles for the life of the Republic against her last internal foe, are gathered up in accumulated terraces of struggle upon the mountain of history, well relieved against those bright and bloody tumultous giant tableaux, and all the dust and thunder of a noble war, the men and women of America will love to gaze upon the stalwart form of the good gray poet, bending to heal the hurts of their wounded and soothe the souls of their dying, and the deep and simple words of the last great martyr will be theirs— 'Well, *he* looks like a MAN!'"

The pamphlet ends with these words: —

"I claim that to expel an author from a public office and subject him to public contumely, solely because he has published a book which no one can declare immoral without declaring all the grand books immoral, is to affix a penalty to thought, and to obstruct the freedom of letters. . . . Difference of opinion there may and must be upon the topics which in this letter I have grouped around it, but upon the act itself there can be none. As I drag it up here into the sight of the world, I call upon every scholar, every man of letters, every editor, every good fellow everywhere who wields the pen, to make common cause with me in rousing upon it the full tempest

of reprobation it deserves. I remember Tennyson, a spirit of vengeance over the desecrated grave of Moore; I think of Scott rolling back the tide of obloquy from Byron; I see Addison gilding the blackening fame of Swift; I mark Southampton befriending Shakespeare; I recall Du Bellay enshielding Rabelais; I behold Hutten fortressing Luther; here is Boccaccio lifting the darkness from Dante, and scattering flame on his foes in Florence; this is Bembo protecting Pomponatius; that is Grostête enfolding Roger Bacon from the monkish fury; there, covered with light, is Aristophanes defending Æschylus; and if there lives aught of that old chivalry of letters, which in all ages has sprung to the succor and defence of genius, I summon it to act the part of honor and duty upon a wrong which, done to a single member of the great confraternity of literature, is done to all, and which flings insult and menace upon every immortal page that dares transcend the wicked heart or the constricted brain. I send this letter to Victor Hugo for its passport through Europe; I send it to John Stuart Mill, to Newman, and Matthew Arnold, for England; I send it to Emerson and Wendell Phillips; to Charles Sumner; to every Senator and Representative in Congress; to all our journalists; to the whole American people; to everyone who guards the freedom of letters and the

liberty of thought throughout the civilized world. God grant that not in vain upon this outrage do I invoke the judgment of the mighty spirit of literature, and the fires of every honest heart!

"WILLIAM DOUGLAS O'CONNOR."

O'Connor's style is that of the Celt who sees red. Nevertheless, to belittle a masterpiece like *The Good Gray Poet* because it is rhetorical is as much beside the mark as to criticise an orator for being oratorical. Yet the "civilized world" received the pamphlet with something of the same indifference which the House of Commons used to manifest toward the impassioned harangues of Edmund Burke. It was months before O'Connor could find a publisher. In the mean time he wrote fiery letters to many persons whose influence he wished to enlist upon Whitman's side. From their replies[1] a few may well be selected for presentation here, in view of their bearing upon the wider question of Whitman's reception by his countrymen. George William Curtis, who had a soul as chivalrous as O'Connor's, as well as a tact, delicacy, and humor which O'Connor sometimes lacked, wrote from his summer home in Ashfield: —

[1] Kindly placed at my disposal by Mrs. Calder.

Ashfield, Mass., 30 Sept., 1865.

My dear O'Connor, — Here, up among the autumn hills, I got your interesting letter of the 2d, and you may be very sure that I will do all I can to redress the wrong of which you speak.

The task you undertake is not easy, as you know. The public sympathy will be with the Secretary for removing a man who will be considered an obscene author and a free lover. But your hearty vindication of Free Letters will not be the less welcome to all liberal men.

Personally I do not know Whitman, and while his "Leaves of Grass" impressed me less than it impressed many better men than I, I have never heard anything of him but what was noble, nor believed anything of him but what was honorable. That a man should be expelled from office and held up to public contumely, because of an honest book which no candid mind can truly regard as hurtful to public morality, *is* an offence which demands exposure and censure. . . .

Goodbye. Let me hear as soon as you will. You know how gladly I shall serve you, & how truly I am

Your friend

G. W. Curtis.

In another month Curtis had received the manuscript of *The Good Gray Poet*, in O'Connor's bold flowing hand. He acknowledged it as follows: —

North Shore, Sunday, 29 Oct., 1865.

My dear O'Connor, — Last evening came your note from Chelsea & the MS. for which the printer (if he ever sees it!!) will invoke benedictions upon your head. I read it all before I went to bed. The rhetoric is gorgeous. Its estimate of the bard of course entirely outruns any present appreciation of him by that public which reads. The one to which he is now so dear — the *public*, not the occasional private like you — is not a reading body.

For my own part I read your lofty praise with admiration and shame that I could be so blind to so great a glory. I shall read the *Drum-Taps* with double interest.

Now that I have read what you have written, I do not feel that it will probably imperil your situation — whether you care for it or not. You criticise Mr. Harlan from a purely impersonal point, as a fool may easily see.

For the substance of the work, you marshal a splendid array of "indecent" witnesses, and bravely accuse all the Great Gods of "nastiness." But I asked myself, as I read, two questions:

First, is there no natural reticence about these sexual relations and organs, — and second, is the sense of various power in the greatest authors at all increased by their use of such allusions as metaphors or otherwise? Is it a prudery or an instinct which secretes the whole matter?

I cannot but doubt if any publisher would like to stem the torrent of censure which the book will probably draw upon him. But while I shall frankly tell him its scope I shall do full justice to the feeling which I have for the true purpose which dictates it and the copious richness with which it is done. Neither you nor it will suffer in my mouth.

I don't believe any man deserves to be spoken of as you speak of your hero, but it must be a delight to you to feel that I am wrong.

Goodbye. I shall report as soon as I can.

Always yours,
G. W. Curtis.

W. D. O'Connor, Esq.,
Chelsea, Mass.

Finally Bunce and Huntington, of New York, issued the pamphlet. Curtis acknowledged its receipt in the following note: —

North Shore, Staten Island,
12 February, 1866.

My dear O'Connor, — I am ashamed of

myself that I have not long ago acknowledged *The Good Gray Poet*. The truth is that I have been racing about the country and intended to have expressed my opinion in the *Weekly*. But I find that it is not practicable to do so. I am sorry, because altho I do not agree with your opinions altogether, I do most heartily sympathize with your generous & eloquent defence of Free Letters.

I see that the pamphlet has excited attention — not indeed as much as I hoped, but you know what a lottery publicity is. The *Nation*, The *Round Table*, The *Commonwealth*, I suppose you have seen, and I should have been very glad to add *H.'s W.* to the number.

I heard it discussed among the *Dii majores* in Boston, but they do not believe in your poet. Lowell told me that he first remembered Whitman in the old *Democratic Review*. That was new to me, as I supposed the *Leaves of Grass* was his maiden speech.

Good bye. I should be glad to know how you are satisfied with the reception of your volley, and am always

Most truly yours,

G. W. Curtis.

W. D. O'Connor, Esq.,
Treasury Department,
Washington, D. C.

Wendell Phillips, himself a master of polemic eloquence, wrote to O'Connor in June, 1866, after reading the pamphlet a second time: —

"I still think it is the most brilliant and vigorous effort I know of in controversial literature. . . . It is one of those essays struck out in the heat of a great emergency which survive the occasion and take their place in living literature. . . . You ought to have been a speaker. Marry your style to a living voice, and we talkers will all take back seats."

The attitude of keensighted journalists at this juncture is well shown in a letter from the vigorous editor of the New York *Times*. O'Connor had sent him *The Good Gray Poet*, and prepared an article on the forthcoming new edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

THE TIMES OFFICE, New York, Oct. 16, 1866.

MY DEAR MR. O'CONNOR, — I am a little puzzled by your proposition about *Leaves of Grass*. It is not a new book and has to encounter a good deal of prejudice. I am not blind to its merits, though I do not rate it so highly as you do. But there are sundry nastinesses in it which will & *ought* to keep it out of libraries and parlors: and I should not like to praise the book without branding them. I know how you defend, or excuse, them — but I don't think the defence

valid *coram populo*. Shakespeare, Montaigne & others might do in their day, what no man can *now*, innocently. Other very gross acts are natural and proper *in their place* but that place is not in public.

So much for that. If you will pardon my hesitation I would be very glad to see your review and will print it if I can. Don't make it too long. Newspaper columns do not suffice to exhaust such a subject. What you said of W. *personally* in your pamphlet was as fine as anything I ever read. I would rather deserve all that than be Emperor.

Yours very truly,

H. J. Raymond.

W. D. O'Connor, Esq.,
Office Light House Board,
Treasury Dept., Washington.

Among the acknowledgments of *The Good Gray Poet* made by foreign men of letters, Matthew Arnold's is very perfect of its kind.

Athenæum Club, Pall Mall, S. W., Sept. 16, 1866.

Dear Sir, — I have been absent from London for some months, and on my return I find your note of the 4th of June with the two books you have been good enough to send me. Their predecessors, which you mention, I do not find.

Mr. Harlan is now, I believe, out of office, but

had he still remained in office I can imagine nothing less likely to make him reconsider his decision respecting your friend than the interference of foreign expostulators in the matter. I have read your statement with interest and I do not contest Mr. Walt Whitman's powers and originality. I doubt, however, whether here, too, or in France, or in Germany, a public functionary would not have had to pay for the pleasure of being so outspoken the same penalty which your friend has paid in America. As to the general question of Mr. Walt Whitman's poetical achievements, you will think that it savours of our decrepit old Europe when I add that while you think it his highest merit that he is so unlike anyone else, to me this seems to be his demerit; no one can afford in literature to trade merely on his own bottom and to take no account of what the other ages and nations have acquired: a great original literature America will never get in this way, and her intellect must inevitably consent to come, in a considerable measure, into the European movement. That she may do this and yet be an independent intellectual power, not merely as you say an intellectual colony of Europe, I cannot doubt; and it is on her doing this, and not on her displaying an eccentric and violent originality that wise Americans should in my opinion set their desires.

With many thanks for the good will towards me which you express, I am, dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,
MATTHEW ARNOLD.

W. D. O'CONNOR, ESQ.,
Washington, D. C.,
United States.

To this deft instruction O'Connor replied (October 14, 1866) in a long and, for him, temperate argument, from which a single paragraph at least may be quoted: —

"I can't agree that America must come into the European movement, as you say, for, and I am sorry so many Englishmen are blind to it, America has a movement of her own, the source of her life, the secret of her power, and I think, if you will pardon me for saying so, there is far more need and probability of Europe coming into our movement, than we into hers. Democracy, true or false, is the doctrine or principle in which this country has its start, and her movement, in literature as in everything else, must proceed and be sustained from it, and not from anything exterior to it. As well expect that our flora and fauna should derive from the influences of another zone, as that our letters, or any form of our life, should find its inspiration and sustenance from the central forces of foreign lands."

The Rev. Moncure D. Conway, who had so promptly called upon Whitman in 1855, was now living in London. O'Connor sent him the pamphlet, and learned with delight that Mr. Conway had already written an article on Whitman — still unpublished — for the *Fortnightly Review*, then under the editorship of G. H. Lewes. The *Fortnightly* article appeared on October 15. It was laudatory, but contained some journalistic exaggerations. O'Connor wrote of it to Trowbridge: "Conway's article in the *Fortnightly* is a frightful mass of misstatement and fiction, redeemed by the Conwegian good-nature and good intentions." Lord Strangford published at the same time in the *Pall Mall Gazette* an able though unsigned commendation of Whitman's work.

The little group of loyal fellow-clerks at Washington took heart. The tireless O'Connor succeeded in getting the New York *Times* to publish (on December 2) his review of the new edition.[1] The *Galaxy* printed (December 1) an enthusiastic review by John Burroughs, whose little book, *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*,[2] was now in manuscript, awaiting a publisher. Walt wrote to his mother on December 10: "It seems as if things

[1] Ready in the late autumn of 1866, but dated 1867.

[2] New York, 1867. Second edition, 1871.

were going to brighten up about *Leaves of Grass*."

The poet himself was, in fact, the least excited of the circle. He accepted their championship with a sort of royal calm. He was now a third-class clerk, drawing $1600 a year. For the first time in his life he was saving money. His boarding place was comfortable. His official desk was at a great south window on the third story of the Treasury Building, affording a spacious view down the shining Potomac. The Treasury guards allowed him free access to his office at night, and the old reading habits of his boyhood asserted themselves. He writes to his mother in those homely, jerky sentences which he doubtless knew she preferred to any other: —

"I go evenings up to the office frequently — I have got me a splendid astral lamp, to burn gas by a tube & it works to admiration, (all at the expense of the office) — & there I can sit, & read &c, as nice as you please — then I am getting many books for the Library (our office Library) that I have long wanted to read at my leisure, — and can get any book I want in reason — so you see it is a great privilege I have here."

Outwardly judged, here was no poet of revolt, surely, nor even a martyr; but a large, bland,

comfortable personage, nearing fifty, and skillfully allowing the reunited nation to pay for his gas and his books. But while his disciples were aware of all this, they believed no less stoutly that Whitman was an incomparable genius. Burroughs wrote on January 4, 1867, to O'Connor, after the latter had been reading the manuscript of his *Notes* : —

"He is, in my opinion, either more & different from any other poet, or he is a ridiculous failure. I am fully persuaded that he belongs to an entirely new class of geniuses which has no type in the past; & that he is to be justified and explained on entirely new grounds. You can never make people believe till the day you die, that Walt is like other poets, & we have got to show new ground, new issues, new ends in literature by which to try him, or we will be forced to admit that he is a tremendous humbug. . . . And more than that, I do not think that either you or I or both, are the guardians of Walt's fame, or that we can make or unmake it."

While Burroughs and O'Connor argued, and Whitman read by his new astral lamp or tramped the streets with Peter Doyle, some of the most subtle of the younger English critics were finding in *Leaves of Grass* a new world of poetry. Frederick W. H. Myers, then a fellow of

Trinity, read from the book to John Addington Symonds, an Oxford man of brilliant mind and delicate body, who listened with "thrills to the very marrow of his bones." Edward Dowden, Tyrrell, and other young Irish scholars were reading it in Dublin. William Bell Scott the artist, who had received a copy from Thomas Dixon "the cork-cutter," Ruskin's friend, introduced it to the notice of Swinburne and W. M. Rossetti. It will be remembered that Emerson had sent a copy to Carlyle, ten years before. Thoreau had sent one to his friend Cholmondeley, and a few other copies had found their way to England. But here was a band of clever university men, scholars and poets of a new generation, who became convinced of Walt Whitman's claims to be the representative poet of democracy.

It has sometimes been urged in explanation of their enthusiasm, that these Englishmen had expected on *a priori* grounds that the typical American poet would wear a flannel shirt and tuck his trousers into his boot-tops, and that therefore, when Whitman appeared clad in that fashion, it was natural to assume that here was the long awaited bard of a big country. There is a pleasing simplicity about this theory. Certain Americans resident in London during the seventies still remember their amazement and

humiliation when a Rocky Mountain poet, their fellow guest at English dinner tables, used to call for cigarettes in the middle of dinner and put two into his mouth at a time, announcing proudly to his host: "That 's the way we do it in the States!" Some English and Continental admiration of Whitman is no doubt due to the discovery in him of a rudeness and indecorum which were thought indispensable to the rôle of a singer of democracy. But the letters of the more discriminating among Whitman's new readers are ample proof that they went below the surface of boisterous manner, and apprehended something of the deeper drift of Whitman's meaning. Horace E. Scudder, a Boston critic of uncommon poise and sobriety, had sent *Drum-Taps* to W. M. Rossetti in 1866 with the comment that no one had caught so perfectly as Whitman "the most elusive elements of American civilization."[1] In Rossetti's ensuing correspondence with O'Connor and with Whitman himself, as shown in the *Rossetti Papers* and elsewhere, there is evidence of sound appreciation of Whitman's prescience as to the vast changes which democracy was working, in England no less than America.

With regard to certain aspects of Whitman's work Rossetti dissented from the first, yet he

[1] *Rossetti Papers*, London, 1902.

threw himself vigorously into the task of making the American writer better known. Mr. Conway, writing to O'Connor on April 30, 1867, reports a consultation of Swinburne, W. M. Rossetti, and J. C. Hotten the publisher, at which he was present, where all agreed that a complete republication of *Leaves of Grass*, without modification of two or three passages, "would bring a legal prosecution on any publisher." Mr. Conway adds that "an enthusiastic admirer of Walt, John Addington Symonds, is preparing a review of him for the *Edinburgh*." Many letters dealing with the question of what should be omitted from the proposed volume passed between London and Washington during the next six months. Rossetti noted in his diary, September 30, 1867: "My principle of selection would be to miss out entirely any poem, though otherwise fine and unobjectionable, which contains any of his extreme crudities of expression in the way of indecency; I would not expurgate such poems, but simply exclude them."[1] This was what was ultimately done. Whitman's letters, printed by Rossetti, show that he was quite willing that Rossetti should make whatever verbal changes or omissions might be thought needful, so long as it was intended to print a volume of Selections only; but that he would not consent to an "expur-

[1] *Rossetti Papers.*

gated edition" of the complete *Leaves of Grass*. It should be remembered in this connection that in his fourth edition, which had been printed at his own expense in Washington some months before, he had tacitly omitted many lines that had given offense. In fact, in none of the poems written after 1860 was there any ground for censorship.

In the mean time Rossetti published (July 6, 1867) an appreciative article in the London *Chronicle*, a short-lived liberal Catholic review. O'Connor was writing for *Putnam's Magazine* an extraordinary story called "The Carpenter,"[1] in which Christ appears in the guise of a working man who has all the outward and many of the inward traits of Whitman. This was the first of many attempts that have been made to express, through the use of the most sacred figure known to humanity, the mysterious potency of Whitman's personality over a certain class of minds. It is significant that it should have been written by one of Whitman's associates, who saw him in the unheroic and disillusioning light of daily contact. "The Carpenter" appeared in January, 1868, and a month later copies of Swinburne's critical study of William Blake reached America. In one of the closing

[1] Now reprinted in O'Connor's *Three Tales*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

passages of this book Swinburne pointed out for the first time the spiritual kinship of Blake and Walt Whitman. Both writers possessed, he declared, "a splendor now of stars and now of storms; an expanse and exaltation of wing across strange spaces of air and upon shoreless stretches of sea; a resolute and reflective love of liberty. . . . Even their shortcomings and errors are nearly akin. Their poetry . . . being oceanic . . . is troubled with violent groundswells and sudden perils of ebb and reflex, of shoal and reef, perplexing to the swimmer or the sailor; it partakes of the powers and the faults of elemental and eternal things; it is at times noisy and barren and loose, rootless and fruitless and informal."[1]

Swinburne's book was followed by Rossetti's Selections.[2] This proved to be an excellently chosen volume, containing the prose essay prefaced to the 1855 edition, and one hundred and three poems, arranged in groups. The editor's Prefatory Notice was straightforward. "In respect of morals or propriety," he "neither admired nor approved the incriminated passages," yet he asserted his belief that Whitman's was "incomparably the *largest* performance of our period in poetry," and that "his voice will one

[1] A. C. Swinburne, *William Blake*, London, 1868, p. 300.
[2] *Poems of Walt Whitman*, London, J. C. Hotten, 1868.

day be potential or magisterial wherever the English language is spoken."

The publication of Rossetti's Selections gained for Whitman one singular and noble friendship, that of Mrs. Anne Gilchrist. Her husband, Alexander Gilchrist, a friend of the Rossettis and the next-door neighbor of the Carlyles on Cheyne Row, had been engaged at the time of his death, in 1861, upon a *Life of Blake*. His widow, who was left with four children, resolved to complete the book, a task which she accomplished in 1863. She was a woman of personal charm, of marked power of character, and had a wide acquaintance among artistic and literary circles. Madox Brown, one of her Pre-Raphaelite friends, happened to lend her Rossetti's volume in June, 1869. Fascinated by what she found there, she begged Rossetti for a complete copy of *Leaves of Grass*. He complied, and her letters about the book were as he notes in his Diary (13 July, 1869) "incredibly enthusiastic." On that day, after some hesitation, he copied and forwarded to O'Connor certain passages from the letters, without mentioning the lady's name. Two of the passages should be reprinted here:

23 *June*. "I shall quite fearlessly accept your kind offer of the loan of a complete edition — certain that that great and divinely beautiful

nature has not, could not, infuse any poison into the wine he has poured out for us. And, as for what you specially allude to, who so well able to bear it — I will say, to judge wisely of it — as one who, having been a happy wife & mother, has learned to accept with tenderness, to feel a sacredness in all the facts of nature? Perhaps Walt Whitman has forgotten — or, thro' some theory in his head, has overridden — the truth that our instincts are beautiful facts of nature, as well as our bodies, & that we have a strong instinct of silence about some things."

11 *July*. "I think it was very manly and kind of you to put the whole of Walt Whitman's poems into my hands; & that I have no other friend who w'd have judged them and me so wisely and generously. . . . In regard to those poems which raised so loud an outcry, I will take courage to say frankly that I find them also beautiful, & that I think even you have misapprehended them. Perhaps indeed they were chiefly written for wives. I rejoice to have read these poems; & if I or any true woman feel that, certainly *men* may hold their peace about them. You will understand that I still think that instinct of silence I spoke of a right and beautiful thing; & that it is only lovers & poets (perhaps only lovers & *this* poet) who may say what they will — the lover to his own, the poet to all, because all are

in a sense his own. Shame is like a very flexible veil that takes faithfully the shape of what it covers — lovely when it hides a lovely thing, ugly when it hides an ugly one. There is not any fear that the freedom of such impassioned words will destroy the sweet shame, the happy silence, that enfold & brood over the secrets of love in a woman's heart."

O'Connor read these letters with jubilation. The unknown Englishwoman had written what no one but a woman could have written, and what no other woman had hitherto had the courage to say. Whitman himself was deeply moved. Rossetti felt that certain portions of the letters should be printed in America, and they finally appeared, after some revision, under the title "A Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman," in the Boston *Radical* for May, 1870.[1] A prefatory note by Rossetti speaks of the letters as "about the fullest, farthest-reaching and most eloquent appreciation of Whitman yet put into writing." Ultimately the poet learned the authorship of the letters, and corresponded with Mrs. Gilchrist. For three years, 1876–79, she resided in America, much of the time near him, and their intimate friend-

[1] They have since been reprinted in Herbert Gilchrist's *Life of Anne Gilchrist*, and in *In Re Walt Whitman*. I have quoted from O'Connor's own copy of the letters, which differs in some respects from the printed versions.

ship continued until her death, at the age of fifty-four, in 1885. She was his "noblest woman friend." Her letters to him have never been published.

While the new and old friends of Whitman were thus actively engaged in his behalf, the poet himself remained, in the language of Marjorie Fleming, "more than usual calm." Terence Mulvaney, playing the part of the god Krishna in the palanquin, was not more imperturbable. Always a notable figure upon the street, and naïvely enjoying that fact, he now found himself something of a celebrity. Young women rose in the horse-cars to give him a seat, though he was not yet fifty. By 1868 his photographs were on public sale in Washington, and he was autographing them for purchasers. His somewhat florid personality repelled a few sensitive observers, as he was well aware. "Some people don't like me," he said to Mrs. O'Connor. But he won a curious, good-natured, half humorous notice from the majority of strollers on the Washington avenues. They hailed him as "Walt," and were vaguely aware that he was a "poet." Yet beneath the surface of these pomps and vanities, the real man abode solitary, brooding, hungering for affection. A few days before Rossetti wrote of him as "so aboriginal and transcendent a genius," Whitman himself was

writing to his mother: "I pass the time very quietly — some evenings I spend in my attic — I have laid in wood & can have a fire when I want it — *I wish you was here.*" He is working at leisure, he tells her, on his "little book in prose," afterwards published as *Democratic Vistas.* An occasional old acquaintance calls upon him, as for instance W. J. Stillman, the artist and war correspondent, who writes to Rossetti that Whitman is "more well-to-do than when I saw him before," and "gray as a badger." His annual leave of absence was usually spent with his mother in Brooklyn, with occasional brief excursions. In the fall of 1868, for example, he visited friends at Providence, and writes back to Eldridge: "I am profoundly impressed with Providence, not only for its charming locality and features, but for its proof & expression of fine relations, as a city, to average human comfort, life, & family & individual independence and thrift. After all, New England forever! (with perhaps just one or two little reservations.)"[1]

When in Brooklyn upon these furloughs he wrote regularly to Peter Doyle. Sometimes he sent Doyle a "good long" kiss, "on the paper here," like an affectionate child. Often he com-

[1] From one of the letters to Eldridge which Mr. John Burroughs has placed at my disposal.

forted him, when ill or out of work, with vigorous admonitions. "As long as the Almighty vouchsafes you health, strength, and a clear conscience, let other things do their worst,— and let Riker[1] go to hell." These letters, as was natural, touched but rarely upon literary matters. Occasionally there were references to current politics. On September 15, 1870, he wrote of the Franco-Prussian war and of the Italian struggle: "As the case stands, I find myself now far more for the *French* than I ever was for the Prussians . . . . Then I propose to take my first drink with you when I return, in celebration of the pegging out of the Pope and all his gang of Cardinals and priests — and entry of Victor Emanuel into Rome, and making it the capital of the great independent Italian nation." As Doyle was a Catholic, it is possible that this comprehensive toast was never drunk.

The following summer was made memorable to Whitman by a letter from Tennyson, the first of a correspondence that continued, at intervals, throughout their lives. In thanking Whitman for a gift of some of his books, Tennyson wrote (July 12, 1871): "I had previously met with several of your works and read them with interest and had made up my mind that you had a large and lovable nature. . . . I trust that if

[1] Doyle's chief.

you visit England you will grant me the pleasure of receiving and entertaining you under my own roof." [1] Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise*, appearing in the same year, contained the fervent poem "To Walt Whitman in America." For the opening of the annual exhibition of the American Institute in New York on September 7 Whitman wrote his *Song of the Exposition*,[2] containing the wonderfully effective description of the passing of the feudal world:

> "Blazon'd with Shakespere's purple page,
> And dirged by Tennyson's sweet sad rhyme."

Whitman's literary activity during this year was notable. He issued, still at his own expense, a fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The general arrangement of the poems, as grouped in the 1867 edition, was retained, with but a few changes. A group of twenty-three new poems, with some others that had been printed previously, was also issued in this year in pamphlet form, under the title *Passage to India*, and in some copies of the 1871 edition of *Leaves of Grass* this pamphlet is included. Its title-poem, "Passage to India," is typical of the mystical, far-ranging reveries with which Whitman's later poetry is increasingly filled. The

[1] T. Donaldson's *Walt Whitman, the Man*, p. 224.

[2] Roberts Brothers of Boston published this poem in pamphlet form, 1871, under the title: *After All, Not to Create Only*.

completion of the Suez Canal and of the Pacific Railroad, making tangible the old dreams of a passage to the Orient, are used as symbols not only of the growing unity of the world, but of the voyages of the soul in search of God. Speaking of "Passage to India" toward the close of his life, he said: "There 's more of me, the essential, ultimate me, in that than in any of the poems. . . The burden of it is evolution—the one thing escaping the other—the unfolding of cosmic purposes."

Dated in 1871, likewise, although completed in 1870, was the prose essay, *Democratic Vistas*. This treatise, composed at intervals during several years, was a reëxamination of the theme of the famous preface of 1855, namely the function of literature in democratic America. Whitman's mind was not fashioned for sustained, close reasoning in prose. But here was a subject upon which he had brooded long and deeply; and though the coils of his thought return again and again upon themselves, making his essay difficult to those who read it for the first time, it remains, in spite of its defects in formal structure, one of the most suggestive and significant contributions to American literature. Beginning with a confession of the appalling dangers of universal suffrage, he asserts that the real problems of humanity

are not political, merely, but social and religious. It is these questions that must be confronted by literature. While democracy has brought about a superficial popular intellectuality, it has failed, thus far, in ministering to the deeper wants of the soul. But a great religious civilization is the only justification of a great material one. Literature has never adequately recognized the people, in their truest self. It must do so. It must teach both individualism and fraternalism, and both of these doctrines must be vitalized by religion. The great literatures, artists and teachers of the past preserve, indeed, all the best experience of humanity hitherto.

Whitman sketches these figures of the past in firm pictorial prose: "For us those beacons burn through all the nights. Unknown Egyptians, graving hieroglyphs; Hindus, with hymn and apothegm and endless epic; Hebrew prophet, with spirituality, as in flashes of lightning, conscience like red-hot iron, plaintive songs and screams of vengeance for tyrannies and enslavement; Christ, with bent head, brooding love and peace, like a dove; Greek, creating eternal shapes of physical and esthetic proportion; Roman, lord of satire, the sword, and the codex;—of the figures, some far off and veil'd, others nearer and visible; Dante,

stalking with lean form, nothing but fibre, not a grain of superfluous flesh; Angelo and the great painters, architects, musicians; rich Shakespere, luxuriant as the sun, artist and singer of feudalism in its sunset, with all the gorgeous colors, owner thereof and using them at will; and so to such as German Kant and Hegel, where they, though near us, leaping over the ages, sit again, impassive, imperturbable, like the Egyptian gods." Nevertheless, to supplement all these, America, too, needs her poets and seers, to interpret, consistently with modern science, the profounder meanings of the present day. Such, in barest outline, is the argument of *Democratic Vistas*.

New evidences of foreign recognition now came thick and fast. Edward Dowden published in the *Westminster Review* for July, 1871, a notable article on Whitman under the title "The Poetry of Democracy." He sent it to Washington, with a friendly letter which led the way to a frequent and intimate correspondence. Some of the foremost critics upon the Continent perceived that a new force had arisen in modern literature. Ferdinand Freiligrath, in an enthusiastic article, accompanied by translations from *Leaves of Grass*, published in the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung* May 10, 1868, had already hailed Whitman's verse as the poetry of the

future.[1] He wrote glowing letters both to Whitman and to O'Connor. Rudolph Schmidt, the Scandinavian critic, translated *Democratic Vistas* into Danish, and wrote upon Whitman in Febuary, 1872, for a Copenhagen journal. In a letter addressed to Whitman in April, Schmidt quotes Björnson as saying, "Walt Whitman makes me a joy as no new man in many years and in one respect the greatest I ever had."[2] On June 1, 1872, Th. Bentzon (Madame Blanc) published an article on the new American poet in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. It seemed as if the tide had really turned at last. Something of the spirit of this happy year appears in Whitman's first letter to Edward Dowden, who kindly allows me to reprint it.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 18, 1872.

DEAR MR. DOWDEN, —

I must no longer delay writing, & to acknowledge your letters of Sept 5 and Oct 15 last. I had previously (Aug 22) written you very briefly in response to your friendly letter of July 23d, the first you wrote me, accompanying copy of the Review.[3] All — letters & Review — have been

[1] "Stehen wir vor einer Zukunftspoesie wie uns schon seit Jahren eine Zukunftsmusik vorkündigt wird? Und ist Walt Whitman mehr als Richard Wagner?"

[2] *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, p. 274.

[3] The *Westminster Review* for July, 1871.

read & re-read. I am sure I appreciate you in them. May I say you do not seem to stand afar off, but very near to me. What John Burroughs brings adds confirmation. I was deeply interested in the accounts given in the letters of your friends. I do not hesitate to call them mine too. . . . Affectionate remembrance to all of them. You especially, and Mrs. Dowden, & indeed all of you, already, I say, stand near to me. I wish each to be told my remembrance (or to see this letter if convenient).

I like well the positions & ideas in your Westminster article — and radiating from the central point of assumption of my pieces being, or commencing "the poetry of Democracy." It presents all the considerations which such a critical text & starting point require, in a full, eloquent, & convincing manner. I entirely accept it, all & several & am not unaware that it probably afforded, if not the only, at least the most likely gate, by which you as an earnest friend of my book, & believing critic of it, would gain entrance to a leading review. — Besides, I think the main theme you exploit is really of the first importance — and all the rest can be broached & led to, through it, as well as any other way.

I would say that (as you of course see) the spine or verterber [*sic*] principle of my book is

a model or ideal (for the service of the New World, & to be gradually absorbed in it) of a complete healthy, heroic, practical modern *Man* — emotional, moral, spiritual, patriotic — a grander better son, brother, husband, father, friend, citizen than any yet — formed & shaped in consonance with modern science, with American Democracy, & with the requirements of current industrial & professional life — model of a Woman also, equally modern & heroic — a better daughter, wife, mother, citizen also, than any yet. I seek to typify a living Human Personality, immensely animal, with immense passions, immense amativeness, immense adhesiveness — in the woman immense maternity — & then, in both, immenser far a *moral conscience*, & in always realizing the direct & indirect control of the divine laws through all and over all forever.

In "Democratic Vistas" I seek to make patent the appalling vacuum, in our times & here, of any school of great imaginative Literature & Art, fit for a Republican, Religious, & Healthy people — and to suggest and prophesy such a Literature as the only vital means of sustaining & perpetuating such a people. I would project at least the rough sketch of such a school of Literatures — an entirely new breed of authors, poets, American, comprehensive, Hegelian, Demo-

cratic, religious — & with an infinitely larger scope & method than any yet [word omitted]

There is one point touched by you in the Westminster criticism that if occasion again arises, might be dwelt on more fully — that is the attitude of sneering denial which magazines, editors, publishers, "critics" &c in the U. S. hold toward "Leaves of Grass." As to "Democratic Vistas" it remains entirely unread, uncalled for here in America. If you write again for publication about my books, or have opportunity to influence any forthcoming article on them, I think it would be a proper & even essential part of such article to include the fact that the books are hardly recognized at all by the orthodox literary & convential [*sic*] authorities of the U. S. — that the opposition is bitter, & in a large majority, & that the author was actually turned out of a small government employment & deprived of his means of support by a Head of Department at Washington solely on account of having written his poems.

True I take the whole matter coolly. I know my book has been composed in a cheerful & contented spirit — & that the same still substantially remains with me (And I want my friends, indeed, when writing for publication about my poetry, to present its gay-heartedness as one of its chief qualities.)

I am in excellent health, & again & still work as clerk here in Washington.

I saw John Burroughs very lately. He is well. He showed me a letter he had just rec'd from you.

I wish more & more (and especially now that I realize I know you, & we should be no strangers) to journey over sea, & visit England & your country.

Tennyson has written to me twice — & very cordial & hearty letters. He invites me to become his guest.

I have rec'd a letter from Joaquin Miller. He was at last accounts in Oregon, recuperating, studying, enjoying grand & fresh Nature, & writing something new.

Emerson has just been this way (Baltimore & Washington) lecturing. He maintains the same attitude — draws on the same themes — as twenty-five years ago. It all seems to me quite attenuated (the *first* drawing of a good pot of tea, you know, and Emerson's was the heavenly herb itself — but what must one say to a *second*, and even *third* or *fourth* infusion?) I send you a newspaper report of his lecture here a night or two ago. It is a fair sample.

And now my dear friend, I must close. I have long wished to write you a letter to show, if nothing more, that I heartily realize your kindness

& sympathy, & would draw the communion closer between us. I shall probably send you anything I publish, and anything about my affairs or self that might interest you. You too must write freely to me — & I hope frequently

Direct WALT WHITMAN
Solicitor's Office Treasury
Washington D. C.
U. S. America.

In June, 1872, Whitman journeyed to Hanover, New Hampshire, to deliver the Commencement Poem at Dartmouth College. The story of his invitation, now told for the first time, is curious. I am indebted for it to Professor Charles F. Richardson of Dartmouth, who ascertained the facts from the surviving ringleaders of what was originally intended as a joke upon the Faculty. He writes as follows: —

"It appears that his selection came, at least in some degree, because of a class feud and the desire on the part of certain members of the class to annoy the faculty by the appearance of a bard objectionable to some. The 'United Literary Societies' (United Fraternity and Social Friends) were then in their decadence, and the choice of orators and poets fell to Senior classes, the members of which were assigned to this or that society alphabetically. Often the Seniors did

not know the society to which they belonged, until there came up some matter of electing undergraduate librarians or Commencement-week celebrities to give addresses. In 1872 there was in the Senior class a semi-jocose organization called 'Captain Cotton's Cadets' — not strictly a wild set, but not precisely the leaders of evangelical activities in the college. These 'Cadets' ran the Senior elections of that year, and incidentally got Whitman to come. And yet, as in Emerson's case in 1838, by luck or malice the then conservative college gave an early hearing to an 'advanced' man.

"Whitman came in his usual familiar garb. His delivery of his poem is said by those who remember it to have been monotonous and without animation, and his voice failed to fill the back part of the church. When he stepped back to his seat there was some doubt whether he had finished, so that the audience was relieved when the chairman rose and shook hands with him. The poem itself was received without interest and without aversion. In the evening Whitman, who impressed his beholders as much older than fifty-three, attended the 'Commencement Concert,' and when others applauded the singers expressed his own approval by waving his arm and shouting 'bravo.' If the students' aim had been to plague the timid faculty, then composed

of strictly 'orthodox' Congregationalists, they were unsuccessful, for the good gray poet was entertained at the house of the gentle wife of Dr. S. P. Leeds, the college pastor, who was then in Europe. On his departure he gave Mrs. Leeds (who did not find him troublesomely peculiar in any way) a copy of 'As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free,'— and so Dartmouth gave its early welcome to the American Homer."

To make this tale of the irony of literary fame complete, I venture to quote from an unpublished manuscript article by "the American Homer" himself, commenting upon the favorable attention excited by his poem.[1]

[1] I am indebted for the use of this manuscript to John Boyd Thacher, Esq., of Albany. Whitman's poem was delivered on June 26. At the head of the MS. is written in blue pencil, in Whitman's hand: "Use this if convenient either Friday, June 28th or Saturday June 29th — (lead, as editorial, and put on 3rd or 4th column of 2d page) follow on copy and read proof carefully by copy." The MS. is written on the back of sheets of Department of Justice stationery. As the Dartmouth poem was already in type at the time of its delivery, it is probable that Whitman wrote the above review before leaving for Hanover. He wrote to Doyle from Hanover on June 27: "Pete, did my poem appear in the Washington papers — I suppose Thursday or Friday — Chronicle or Patriot? If so send me one — (or one of each)." — Nothing seems to have appeared, however, in the *Chronicle* or *Patriot*.

"WALT WHITMAN

"The late Dartmouth College utterance of the above-named celebrity is again arousing attention to his theory of the poet's art, and its exemplification in his writings. An intellectual career, steadily pressing its way amid strong impediments, through the past sixteen or seventeen years, and evidencing itself during that time in the good-sized volume of poems, '*Leaves of Grass*,' and the small prose book, '*Democratic Vistas*,' shows no sign of flagging energy in its late effusions, the American Institute poem, the cheering apostrophe to France, or in this College Commencement piece, 'As a strong Bird, on Pinions free,' which, with some others, forms the first installment of a new volume just published. In the preface to it, the author says that as he intended his 'Leaves' to be the songs of a great composite Democratic individual he has in mind to chant, in the new volume, of which he gives the first installment, a great composite Democratic nationality.

"Walt Whitman's form of composition is not attractive at first sight to accustomed readers of verse. He discharges himself quite altogether from the old laws of 'poetry,' considering them and their results unfit for present needs, and especially unfit for the United States, and claims to in-

augurate an original modern style, to be followed & expanded by future writers. His theory is that our times exhibit the advent of two especially new creative worlds, or influences, giving a radically changed form to Civilization, namely, the world of science for one, and the world of democratic republicanism for another, and that a third influence, a new poetic world of character and form, adjusted to the new spirit and facts and consistent with democracy and science, is indispensable. He says the United States must found their own imaginative literature & poetry, & that nothing merely copied from & following out the feudal world will do. His aim is therefore a profound one & essentially revolutionary. He dismisses without ceremony all the orthodox accoutrements, tropes, verbal haberdashery, 'feet,' and the entire stock in trade of rhyme-talking heroes and heroines and all the love-sick plots of customary poetry, and constructs his verse in a loose and free metre of his own, of an irregular length of lines, apparently lawless at first perusal, although on closer examination a certain regularity appears, like the recurrence of lesser and larger waves on the sea-shore, rolling in without intermission, and fitfully rising and falling.

"In this free metre, and in verses — when you get the hang of them — singularly exhilarat-

ing, and that affect one like an atmosphere unusually charged with oxygen, he, by a perpetual series of what might be called *ejaculations*, manages to express himself on about every theme interesting to humanity, or known to the body, passions, experiences, emotions of man or woman, or sought by the intellect and soul, with illustrations drawn largely from our own times and country, & somewhat from every age and country.

"Undoubtedly with his new volume, including the College poem, 'As a Strong Bird,' the reputation of this author, though still disputed, is to mount beyond anything previously, and his claims are to pique the public ear more than ever. Expectation is even now more and more stimulated, and already, by a few of the boldest prophets, some very audacious speculations are launched forth. Time only can show if there is indeed anything in them. This Walt Whitman — this queer one whom most of us have watched, with more or less amusement, walking by — this goer and comer, for years, about New York and Washington — good natured with everybody, like some farmer, or mate of some coasting vessel, familiarly accosted by all, hardly any one of us stopping to Mr. him — this man of many characters, among the rest that of volunteer help in the army hospitals and on the field during the whole

of the late war, carefully tending all the wounded he could, southern or northern — if it should turn out that in this plain unsuspected old customer, dressed in gray & wearing no neck tie, America and her republican institutions are possessing that *rara avis* a real national poet, chanting, putting in form, in her own proud spirit, in first class style, for present & future time, her democratic shapes even as the bards of Judah put in song, for all time to come, the Hebrew spirit, and Homer the war-life of prehistoric Greece, and Shakespeare the feudal shapes of Europe's kings and lords!

"Whether or not the future will justify such extravagant claims of his admirers, only that future itself can show. But Walt Whitman is certainly taking position as an original force and new power in literature. He has excited an enthusiasm among the republicans and young poets of Europe unequalled by our oldest and best known names. The literary opposition to him in the United States has, it is true, been authoritative, and continues to be so. But the man has outlived the stress of misrepresentation, burlesque, evil prophecy, and all calumnies & imputations, and may now answer, as Captain Paul Jones did, when, after the onslaught of the Serapis, he was asked if he had struck his colors —'Struck?' answered the Captain quietly,

'Not at all — I have only just begun my part of the fighting.'"

The humor, the follies, and the pathos of the struggle for literary reputation have rarely been written more clearly than in this record of Whitman's visit to Dartmouth College.

Leaving Hanover, Whitman returned by way of Burlington, Vermont, where his married sister, Hannah, was living. By the first of July he was back in Washington. In September his mother, now seventy-five and very feeble, moved to Camden, New Jersey, to live with her son George, who was prospering in business. But her sojourn was to be but brief; and Walt's ten years of life in Washington were almost over.

As the winter drew on, he complained occasionally of those "spells in the head" which had troubled him at intervals since his breakdown in 1864. On the 23d of January, 1873, he sat late by his astral lamp in the Treasury Building, reading a Bulwer-Lytton novel. As he left, the guard thought that he looked ill. Between three and four in the morning, in his solitary lodging, he woke to find himself partially paralyzed. For a few days his friends feared the worst. Doyle, Mrs. O'Connor, Eldridge, and the rest, were constant in their at-

tentions. Then he began to rally, and by the last of March he was crawling back to his desk for a little work each day. But trouble upon trouble came. "Jeff's" wife, Martha, a special favorite, died in St. Louis. The old mother in Camden fell ill, and Walt was sorely anxious. On May 10 he made his own will. Ten days later, feeble as he was, he made the journey to Camden, and he was there, in his brother's little house at 322 Stevens Street, when their mother passed away. She died on May 23.

"I cannot be reconciled yet," he wrote Peter Doyle in August; "it is the great cloud of my life." Between Whitman and the large, simple nature of his mother there had been bonds of deepest instinctive sympathy. Her death left him pathetically lonely. His brother George was kind, but of a wholly different fibre: caring, as Walt once said, "more for pipes than for poems." He offered Walt house-room at Camden, and in the poet's illness and sorrow a return to Washington seemed, for the present at least, impossible.

It turned out that he never went back. He was now fifty-four, and he had nearly a score of years still before him. But his departure from Washington in 1873 marked the end of an epoch. Though he was still to write a few

poems and many of the best pages of his prose, the work to which he owes his fame was done. He was to make new friends, and to become increasingly the picturesque object of literary pilgrimages. But the pleasant fellowships of the Washington period were past. The circle broke up. Peter Doyle went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad. John Burroughs bought a farm on the Hudson. The loyal William O'Connor had become estranged, the original cause being, it is said, a trivial though violent difference of opinion over the merits of Sumner's reconstruction legislation, which Walt had attacked and O'Connor defended till both men lost their tempers. Ultimately they were reconciled, but the estrangement was doubly painful to men of such an emotional type, and such capacity for affection.

In one respect only does Whitman, during these ten years and later, seem to have failed in the finer obligations of friendship. He accepted the worship of those younger men, who gave freely of their time, their literary zeal, their scanty money, in championing his cause. He allowed them to think that in certain aspects of his past experience — challenged by the enemy, and passionately defended by them — his life was known to them. And it was not. Loquacious as was *Leaves of Grass* in the mystical

frenzies of its confessionals, the actual Walt Whitman of Brooklyn and Washington was shrewdly reticent. If he chose — as in this instance he did choose — concealment,

> "the secrets of nature
> Have not more gifts in taciturnity."

CHAPTER VI

THE CAMDEN BARD

Alas! how full of fear
Is the fate of Prophet and Seer!
Forevermore, forevermore,
It shall be as it hath been heretofore;
The age in which they live
Will not forgive
The splendor of the everlasting light
That makes their foreheads bright,
Nor the sublime
Fore-running of their time!

LONGFELLOW, *Christus: A Mystery.*

CAMDEN, New Jersey, Whitman's home during the last nineteen years of his life, is to the city of Philadelphia, which is separated from it by the Delaware River, what Hoboken is to New York, and Chelsea to Boston. The New York *Sun* once described it as the refuge of those who were in doubt, debt, or despair. Yet it was now to have its *vates sacer*, with the band of disciples, the travel-stained pilgrims, and ultimately the famous tomb. A lucky town, therefore, however commonplace.

For some months after his mother's death, Whitman occupied her room in his brother's house at 322 Stevens Street. He secured a substitute, Walter Godey, to perform his duties at Washington. The Treasury authorities were considerate, and allowed this arrangement to continue for more than a year, when, as Whitman did not return, his clerkship was given to another man. In the mean time his life settled into the routine of semi-invalidism. He paid for his board, his savings being sufficient for his immediate maintenance. In September, 1873, the Whitmans moved to a new corner house, 431 Stevens Street. Walt, with his old habit, chose a room on the top floor. On pleasant days he would hobble with his cane to the ferry and cross the Delaware to Philadelphia, where the drivers of the Market Street horsecars, who knew him as "the Camden poet," used to let him sit on their chairs upon the front platform for long rides. He wrote occasionally to Eldridge and to Peter Doyle, sending to the latter *Scottish Chiefs* and other books, together with curiously explicit advice about the style of his clothes.

As he gradually recovered strength, he began to compose verse again. "The Prayer of Columbus," in which the author is disguised as the great Genoese, appeared in *Harper's* for

March, 1874. "The Song of the Universal," read by proxy at the Commencement of Tufts College, Massachusetts, in 1874, and "The Song of the Redwood Tree," date from this same period; and all three poems are notable for their nobility of feeling and their comparative freedom from extravagance and eccentricity of form. Indeed, in the regularity of their rhythmical design, and their skillful use of the repetend and other technical devices, they are dangerously near the confines of that "conventional" poetry which Whitman affected to despise.

He was not wholly happy under his brother's roof, and formed various plans for building a cottage on a cheap lot which he had bought, thus "laying up here in Camden," like a sailor home from voyaging. But his little hoard of ready money was growing steadily less. He was unable to do any consecutive work, though he sometimes amused himself by setting up some of his poems in a Camden printing-office. Throughout 1875 he was in low spirits, — lonely, with penury near at hand. In the following spring, Mr. Robert Buchanan, the English poet and writer, who had already involved himself in controversy with Dante Rossetti and Swinburne, published in the London *News* a letter setting forth the American neglect of Whitman in his illness and poverty. W. M. Rossetti wrote to Whitman at

once for information, and the latter replied[1] with much simplicity and self-respect that he was not actually in want, but that he would gratefully accept any effort which his English friends might make to further the sale of his books, — which were still, it must be remembered, sold only by himself. The current edition was the sixth, — the so-called Centennial edition of 1876, — consisting of two volumes, one made up of *Leaves of Grass*, and the other, entitled *Two Rivulets*,[2] containing a few new poems, besides "Democratic Vistas" and other prose pieces.

The result of this correspondence was most gratifying. "Those blessed gales from the British Isles probably (certainly) saved me," wrote Whitman afterward. The price of the books was ten dollars a set, but many Englishmen followed the example of Tennyson and Ruskin in paying double or treble prices, and "both the cash and the emotional cheer were deep medicines." In the long lists of subscribers [3] appear such well-known names as W. M. and Dante Rossetti, Lord Houghton, Edward Dowden, Mrs. Gilchrist, Edward Carpenter, Alfred Tennyson,

[1] This letter is printed on p. 310 of the *Prose Works*.

[2] In a letter to Edward Dowden, May 2, 1875, Whitman explained that this title symbolized "two flowing chains of prose & verse, emanating the real & ideal."

[3] See page 519 of *Prose Works*.

John Ruskin, W. B. Scott, Edmund Gosse, George Saintsbury, G. H. Lewes, G. H. Boughton, Alexander Ireland, M. D. Conway, Rev. T. E. Brown, P. B. Marston, J. H. McCarthy, A. B. Grosart, Hubert Herkomer, R. L. Nettleship, W. J. Stillman, and F. Madox Brown. No wonder the broken-down poet in Camden, ridiculed or ignored by most of his countrymen, again took heart. From a letter to Edward Dowden, dated March 4, 1876, a grateful passage may be given here as typical of Whitman's feelings. "To-day comes your affectionate hearty valued letter of Feb. 16, all right with enclosure — draft 12£ 10s, all deeply appreciated — the *letter* good, cannot be better, but, as always, the *spirit* the main thing — (altogether like some fresh, magnetic, friendly breath of breeze 'way off there from the Irish coast) — I wonder if you can know how much good such things do me."

That there was some resentment in this country at the tone of Mr. Buchanan's letter is evidenced by a courteous rejoinder to it by George William Curtis. He pointed out in the "Easy Chair" of *Harper's Monthly* for June, 1876, that "Mr. Whitman has had the same opportunity that Mr. Bryant and Mr. Longfellow have had. His works have been very widely read and criticised. He has found a place in several of the chief magazines. He has had an enthusiastic

and devoted body of admirers, who have extolled him as immeasurably superior to all other American authors. He has been in no sense neglected or obscure, but an unusual public curiosity has always attended him. . . . There is no conspiracy against Mr. Whitman, nor any jealousy of him among the acknowledged chiefs of American literature, and were he or his friends to authorize an appeal like that made by Mr. Buchanan, there would be a response, we are very sure, which would dispose of that gentleman's assertions and innuendoes."

Whitman himself maintained a dignified silence. With an instinct deeper than any reasoning, he turned to Nature, the waiting mother. Ten or a dozen miles from Camden he found a secluded spot on Timber Creek, near a farmhouse kept by friendly people named Stafford. Making his home with them from early spring to autumn, he spent for two or three years most of his time out of doors, along the banks of Timber Creek.[1] At first he asked but little: "The trick is, I find, to tone your wants and tastes low down enough, and make much of negatives, and of mere daylight and the skies." But soon he found more positive comfort. "After you have exhausted what there is in business, poli-

[1] For pictures of this delightful spot, see the illustrations in H. B. Binns's *Walt Whitman.*

tics, conviviality, love, and so on — have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear — what remains? Nature remains; to bring out from their torpid recesses, the affinities of a man or woman with the open air, the trees, fields, the changes of seasons — the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night. . . . Dear, soothing, healthy, restoration-hours!"

Bathing solitary in the spring that brimmed an abandoned marl-pit, wrestling, as his strength returned, with the tough saplings, sitting motionless, hour after hour, to watch the dragon-flies and kingfishers, he grew slowly into his old habit of happiness again. The illness seemed to leave him with even finer senses than before and with a new power of close observation of the ways of nature. His ear and eyesight had always been acute, but he had hitherto been a roamer through the out-door world rather than a watcher of it. Now no sound or color or perfume seemed to escape him; he listened to the migrating birds at midnight, the bumble-bees in the grass, the low wind in the tree-tops. He watched fugitive shadows on the grass and the hawk circling in the sky, and he was content at heart. He learned the lesson of the trees. He made lists, quite like those now recommended to twentieth century school-children, of the flowers and birds which he came to know at sight. He wrote about all these

things in his diary, published later under the title *Specimen Days*, and neither Thoreau, Richard Jefferies, nor John Burroughs has commanded at will for such a purpose a more simple and charming prose.

But the increasing disposition of his mind, as his purely creative impulse began to slacken, was to search back of the outward facts of Nature, for her spirit and purpose. "I, too, like the rest, feel the modern tendencies (from all the prevailing intellections, literature and poems) to turn everything to pathos, ennui, morbidity, dissatisfaction, death. Yet how clear it is to me that those are not the results, influences of Nature at all, but of one's own distorted, sick or silly soul. Here, amid this wild, free scene, how healthy, how joyous, how clean and vigorous and sweet!" Often in the lane or by the stream at night, he watched the stars, with brooding thoughts that recall the meditations of dreamers like Amiel and Sénancour: "As if for the first time, indeed, creation noiselessly sank into and through me its placid and untellable lesson, beyond — O, so infinitely beyond! — anything from art, books, sermons or from science, old or new. The spirit's hour — religion's hour — the visible suggestion of God in space or time — now once definitely indicated, if never again. The untold pointed at — the heavens all paved

with it. The Milky Way, as if some superhuman symphony, some ode of universal vagueness disdaining syllable and sound — a flashing glance of Deity, address'd to the soul. All silently — the indescribable night and stars — far off and silently." [1]

Such lonely raptures are characteristic of the Timber Creek period of Whitman's convalescence. But many new friendships date from these years. In 1876 Mrs. Gilchrist settled in Philadelphia, with her children, for a long sojourn, and Whitman became a frequent guest at her house. In January, 1877, he spoke briefly at the 140th anniversary of the birthday of Thomas Paine. The next month he visited Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Johnston, new and warm friends in New York, and much enjoyed a reception in his honor. In May, Edward Carpenter, an attractive young Englishman, full of zeal for the Whitman gospel, which he has since expounded in many books of prose and Whitmanian verse, came to visit the poet in Camden. Shortly afterward came Dr. R. M. Bucke, a Canadian physician in charge of the insane asylum at London, Ontario. He was then forty, a man of force and character, and of good professional standing. As his *Cosmic Consciousness* afterwards showed, he was himself a mystic of a pronounced type, and had once, while

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 112.

driving home at midnight in a hansom cab, been wrapped in a flame-colored cloud and illuminated by a consciousness of the possession of eternal life, and of the immortality of all men.[1] For nine years previous to 1877, he had been reading Walt Whitman, although at first with anger and bewilderment. Now he sought him out in Camden, finding in the local directory the address: "Whitman, Walt, Poet, 431 Stevens Street." Dr. Bucke relates that he was "almost amazed by the beauty and majesty of his person and the gracious air of purity that surrounded and permeated him."[2] The interview was but brief, and Whitman said nothing that Bucke remembered, but "a sort of spiritual intoxication set in. . . . It seemed to me at that time certain that he was either actually a god or in some sense clearly and entirely preterhuman. Be all this as it may, it is certain that the hour spent that day with the poet was the turning point of my life." For the next fifteen years Dr. Bucke was unwearied in the offices of friendship, publishing in 1883 a valuable biography of Whitman, and becoming ultimately one of his literary executors.

John Burroughs was now settled happily

[1] See the quotation from Bucke in William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 398.

[2] *Walt Whitman Fellowship Papers*, vi, Philadelphia, September, 1894.

upon his farm on the Hudson, and here Whitman visited him in 1878 and again in the following year. On April 14, 1879, he was strong enough to deliver in New York a memorial address on Lincoln, which was repeated in subsequent years in Philadelphia and in Boston, and which he was anxious to give annually so long as his strength should permit. These lectures were attended by the curious as well as by the loyal, and they received a measure of newspaper publicity. In September, 1879, Whitman made the second long journey of his life, traveling with friends as far west as the Rocky Mountains, and returning to Camden in January, after a stay in St. Louis with his brother "Jeff." The story of his travels is written in *Specimen Days*, and in a few picturesque poems like "Italian Music in Dakota" and "Spirits that formed this Scene." There was something in the chasms and gorges and fantastic forms of the Rockies that made him exclaim over and over again: "I have found the law of my own poems!" He felt anew that the boundless prodigality of the Mississippi and Missouri valleys had never been adequately expressed in literature, but that he himself had made a beginning toward it.

In the following June he journeyed to Canada as the guest of the friendly Dr. Bucke. On the

way he saw Niagara. "We were very slowly crossing the Suspension bridge — not a full stop anywhere, but next to it — the day clear, sunny, still — and I out on the platform. The falls were in plain view about a mile off, but very distinct, and no roar — hardly a murmur. The river trembling green and white, far below me; the dark, high banks, the plentiful umbrage, many bronze cedars, in shadow; and tempering and arching all the immense materiality, a clear sky overhead, with a few white clouds, limpid, spiritual, silent." He was deeply impressed by the Sunday services for the insane at Dr. Bucke's asylum, finding beneath those crazed faces, "strange as it may sound, *the peace of God that passeth all understanding*." His older brother, Jesse, had died in such a retreat ten years before. Under Dr. Bucke's guidance, Whitman took the impressive trip up the Saguenay to Chicoutimi, and then, after one of the happiest summers of his old age, returned to Camden.

In February, 1881, Thomas Carlyle died. Though Whitman had never seen him, he had read some of his books with close attention. *Sartor Resartus* was unquestionably one of the seed-books from which *Leaves of Grass* sprang, and many passages in *Democratic Vistas* were intended as a reply to Carlyle's pamphlet,

Shooting Niagara. Whitman's reverie, at the hour of Carlyle's passing, shows the spiritual mood which grew more and more characteristic of his closing years.

"In the fine cold night, unusually clear, (February 5, '81) as I walk'd some open grounds adjacent, the condition of Carlyle, and his approaching — perhaps even then actual — death, filled me with thoughts eluding statement, and curiously blending with the scene. The Planet Venus, an hour high in the west, with all her volume and lustre recover'd, (she has been shorn and languid for nearly a year,) including an additional sentiment I had never noticed before — not merely voluptuous, Paphian, steeping, fascinating — now with calm, commanding seriousness and hauteur — the Milo Venus now. Upward to the zenith Jupiter, Saturn, and the moon past her quarter, trailing in procession, with the Pleiades following, and the constellation Taurus and red Aldebaran. Not a cloud in heaven. Orion strode through the southeast, with his glittering belt — and a trifle below hung the sun of the night, Sirius. Every star dilated, more vitreous, nearer than usual. Not as in some clear nights when the larger stars entirely outshine the rest. Every little star or cluster just as distinctly visible, and just as nigh. Berenice's hair showing every gem, and new ones. To the northeast and

north the Sickle, the Goat and Kids, Cassiopeia, Castor and Pollux, and the two dippers. While through the whole of the silent, indescribable show, inclosing and bathing my whole receptivity, ran the thought of Carlyle dying. (To soothe and spiritualize, and, as far as may be solve the mysteries of death and genius, consider them under the stars at midnight).

"And now that he has gone hence, can it be that Thomas Carlyle, soon to chemically dissolve to ashes and by winds, remains an identity still? In ways perhaps eluding all the statements, lore and speculations of ten thousand years — eluding all possible statements to mortal sense — does he yet exist, a definite, vital being, a spirit, an individual — perhaps now wafted in space among those stellar systems, which, suggestive and limitless as they are, merely edge more limitless, far more suggestive systems? I have no doubt of it. In silence, of a fine night, such questions are answer'd to the soul, the best answers that can be given. With me, too, when depress'd by some specially sad event, or tearing problem, I wait till I go out under the stars for the last voiceless satisfaction."[1]

In April Whitman visited Boston to read the Lincoln lecture, and found to his pleasure "a good deal of the Hellenic" in the old city, "and

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 162.

the people getting handsome too," especially the gray-haired women at his lecture, "healthy and wifely and motherly, and wonderfully charming and beautiful." He was received with "glowing warmth and courtesy" by Longfellow, who had visited him in Camden three years before. For "two rapt hours" he sat before the collection of J. F. Millet's pictures at Mr. Quincy A. Shaw's, penetrated and uplifted by the spirit of that great artist, between whose genius and that of Whitman himself there are so many points of contact. And Whitman also stood for a long time late one Sunday afternoon, "in silence and half lights, in the great nave of Memorial hall, Cambridge, the walls thickly cover'd with mural tablets, bearing the names of students and graduates of the university who fell in the secession war." He knew what it signified.

A few weeks later he went back, after an absence of forty years (save for one brief visit) to see the village where he was born. Dr. Bucke accompanied him, and they drove over the old farms of Walt's ancestors, and deciphered the moss-grown names in the ancient family burying grounds of the Whitmans and Van Velsors. A few of the older inhabitants of Huntington remembered him, but there was then, as there is to-day, but a scant measure of local pride in Whitman's fame. At the Bicentennial of Suffolk

County, in 1883, the orator of the day pointed proudly to poets of the county: "In poetry, Terry, Gardiner and Tooker hold no mean place." But he forgot Walt Whitman.

After returning from Long Island, Whitman lingered a while in New York and found his former host, Pfaff, in a new restaurant on 24th Street. The two old men drank to the memory of the long vanished frequenters of their shabby Bohemia in "big, brimming, fill'd up champagne glasses, drain'd in abstracted silence."

After his visit to Boston in April he had received a proposal, through John Boyle O'Reilly, from the firm of James R. Osgood and Company, to publish a definitive edition of *Leaves of Grass*. He replied that the edition, if published by this house, must be complete: "Fair warning on one point, the sexuality odes about which the original row was started and kept up so long are all retained and must go in the same as ever."[1] The publishers therefore asked to see the copy, and formally accepted the book, agreeing to pay a royalty of twelve and one half per cent. For the first time since the unlucky Thayer and Eldridge edition of 1860 the book was to bear a regular publisher's imprint, and the house was one of high standing. At the end of August, Whitman

[1] See "Walt Whitman and his Second Boston Publishers," Camden Edition, volume viii. p. 276.

returned to Boston to see the edition through the press. For two or three months he enjoyed himself greatly. He made his headquarters at the Hotel Bulfinch, spent much of his spare time on the Common and by the shore at City Point, and was hospitably entertained on all sides.

The most significant courtesy which he received, came, he thought, from Concord. He was the guest of Mr. F. B. Sanborn, and shortly after his arrival had a "long and blessed evening" with Emerson. Whitman described the elder poet with one of those graphic little touches in which Carlyle alone surpassed him: "a good color in his face, eyes clear, with the well-known expression of sweetness, *and the old clear-peering aspect quite the same.*" The next day Whitman, with his host and hostess, was bidden to a family dinner at the Emerson home. As is well known, Emerson's memory was failing rapidly, and his son has noted that he had to be told who Whitman was. But to Whitman the dinner was deeply symbolical. There is something touching in his interpretation of it.

"I doubt whether there is anything more affecting or emphatic in Emerson's whole career — a sort of last coruscation in the evening twilight of it — than his driving over to Frank Sanborn's in Concord Sept. 1881 to deliberately pay those 'respects' for which he had obli-

gated himself twenty-five years before. Nor was the unusual compliment of the hospitable but formal dinner made the next day for Walt Whitman by Mr. and Mrs. Emerson, without a marked significance. It was a beautiful autumn Sunday. And if that afternoon, with its occurrences there in his own mansion, surrounded by all his family, wife, son, daughters, son-in-law, nearest relatives and two or three very near friends — some fourteen or fifteen in all — if that does not mean how Emerson by this simple, yet almost solemn rite, wished before he departed to reiterate and finally seal his verdict of 1856 [1855], then there is no significance in human life or its emotions or actions." [1]

Whitman returned to Camden in November, and throughout the winter was cheered by the moderate success of the Osgood edition, which sold about two thousand copies. Then, on March 1, 1882, came trouble. Oliver Stevens, the District Attorney at Boston, upon complaint made by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and under the direction of State Attorney-General Marston, notified Osgood and Company that *Leaves of Grass* was "within the provisions of

[1] From a hitherto unprinted memorandum of "Whitman's relations to Emerson," enclosed in a letter to O'Connor on May 28, 1882, for O'Connor's use in a proposed letter to the New York *Tribune*.

the Public Statutes respecting obscene literature," and "suggested" its suppression. Whitman, upon receiving word from the publishers that they were "naturally reluctant to be identified with any legal proceedings in a matter of this nature," receded temporarily from his earlier position, and wrote: "I am willing to make a revision and cancellation in the pages alluded to — would n't be more than half a dozen anyhow — perhaps indeed about ten lines to be left out and a half dozen words or phrases." But this would not serve. The District Attorney furnished a list of the passages and lines which must be expunged.[1] Whitman, who was now getting obstinate again, rejected it "whole and several." Then the publishers proposed as a probably satisfactory compromise, the omission of two poems only,[2] — the remaining passages to be allowed to stand. Whitman replied: "No, I cannot consent to leave out the two pieces." There was therefore nothing left for the publishers but to stand trial or cease to circulate the book. They chose the latter course, and after an amicable correspondence turned over the plates of the book to the author. He promptly transferred them to Rees, Welsh and

[1] Given on p. 149 of Bucke's *Walt Whitman*.

[2] "A Woman Waits for Me," and "To a Common Prostitute."

Company, of Philadelphia, who were soon succeeded by David McKay.

"I do not myself," wrote Whitman to O'Connor, "feel any resentment towards Osgood and Company for anything done me or the book — They have acted with reference to conventional business and other circumstances. Marston is the target for you." [1] O'Connor's reconciliation with Whitman had but recently taken place, yet Walt knew that he could count upon the hot-tempered Irishman in this emergency. The New York *Tribune* opened its columns to O'Connor on May 25, and he blazed away at his triple "target" — Osgood, Marston, and Stevens — to his heart's content.[2] Other American newspapers — with but very few exceptions — were outspoken in their condemnation of the ill-advised action of the Massachusetts authorities. Postmaster Tobey of Boston, who had excluded *Leaves of Grass* from the mails, was directed by the Washington authorities to revoke his order. It proved to be the last attempt at such persecution. For the remaining ten years of his life, though his poetry was frequently ridiculed, Whitman received from the press and the public almost unvarying personal kindness and respect.

[1] Unpublished letter of May 17, 1882.

[2] For a portion of this communication, see Bucke's *Walt Whitman*, pp. 150–152.

It was during this spring of 1882 that both Longfellow and Emerson passed away. No biographer or critic of Longfellow has characterized him more felicitously than Whitman in this passage from his diary: "He is certainly the sort of bard and counteractant most needed for our materialistic, self-assertive, money-worshipping, Anglo-Saxon races, and especially for the present age in America — an age tyrannically regulated with reference to the manufacturer, the merchant, the financier, the politician and the day workman — for whom and among whom he comes as the poet of melody, courtesy, deference — poet of the mellow twilight of the past in Italy, Germany, Spain and in Northern Europe — poet of all sympathetic gentleness — and universal poet of women and young people. I should have to think long if I were asked to name the man who has done more, and in more valuable directions, for America." Whitman's comment upon Emerson's death, a month later, was also very perfect: "A just man, poised on himself, all-loving, all-inclosing, and sane and clear as the sun." A more formal criticism of Emerson, in his *Prose Works*,[1] contains some penetrating sentences: "His final influence is to make his students cease to worship anything — almost cease to believe in anything, outside

[1] Page 315.

of themselves. . . . The best part of Emersonianism is, it breeds the giant that destroys itself. Who wants to be any man's mere follower? lurks behind every page. No teacher ever taught, that has so provided for his pupils' setting up independently — no truer evolutionist." Such passages as these, together with similar ones upon Poe, Bryant, Whittier, Burns, and Tennyson, reveal a critical tact, a fineness both of perception and of phrasing, which has surprised many readers who knew Whitman only as the chanter of "barbaric yawps."

In the autumn of 1882 he published *Specimen Days and Collect*,[1] a volume including all of his prose then gathered. He wrote to O'Connor: "Do you know what *ducks and drakes* are? Well, S. D. [*Specimen Days*] is a rapid skimming over the pond-surface of my life . . . the real area altogether untouched, but the flat pebble making a few dips as it flies & flits along — enough at least to give some living touches and contact points."[2] This was a modest description of a book which contains much delightful and suggestive writing, but which has never won an audience at all comparable with its deserts.[3]

[1] Rees, Welsh and Company, Philadelphia. Some copies have the imprint of David McKay.

[2] From an unpublished letter.

[3] "Nobody cares a damn for the prose," was Whitman's terse summary of the situation.

Dr. Bucke's biographical and critical study entitled *Walt Whitman*[1] was now ready, and was published in 1883. Frankly the work of a personal friend and disciple, it nevertheless endeavored to present all the known facts about the poet. It gathered a mass of contemporary testimony and opinion. In a circular sent out in June, 1880, begging for personal memoranda about Whitman to be used in preparing this biography, Dr. Bucke had said plainly: "I am myself fully satisfied that Walt Whitman is one of the greatest men, if not the very greatest man, that the world has so far produced." The appendix contained many of the criticisms called forth by the first editions of *Leaves of Grass*. O'Connor's "Good Gray Poet" was included, — reprinted in its entirety, with a few verbal changes, — and O'Connor introduced it with a new letter, more than half as long as his original pamphlet, in which he attacked Walt's recent critics with unabated fire and fury. All this gave Dr. Bucke's book a polemical tone which limited its influence. A single well-considered essay like that published by Mr. E. C. Stedman in *Scribner's* (now the *Century*) for November, 1880, — half-hearted as it then seemed to Whitman, O'Connor, and Bucke, — probably did more to win readers for the poet than all the undiscriminating eulogy of the

[1] Philadelphia, David McKay, 1883.

Whitman Militants. Nevertheless, Dr. Bucke's loyalty and zeal have placed every admirer of Whitman under obligation to him, and his book remains one of permanent interest to students.

One result of its publication was a renewed exchange of letters between Whitman and O'Connor. The former writes, apropos of a slighting reference by Emerson, published not long before in the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence: —

CAMDEN N J
Feb: 21 '83 — p. m.

. . . . I am curious to see the Carlyle-Emerson letters — (had not heard before about my being in them) — You hit long ago on the reason why of the Emerson (apparent) change, or defection or cloud — whatever it is to be call'd — it was the interference, doubtless *hard lying*, of others, — and there was & is a little knot of my most malignant enemies, — *deadly haters*, — in & around Boston — some in high quarters — and they plied the man incessantly.[1]

One may trace here the evidence, which is to be noted increasingly in Whitman's last years, of an occasional petulance, — the grievance of a man who imagines that he is under persecution. That Emerson was ever in this way "plied incessantly" by any one, is too absurd for serious

[1] From an unpublished letter.

refutation. Equally absurd was Whitman's notion that Ruskin, who had spoken to friends about *Leaves of Grass*, — "Emerson and Whitman are deadly true — in the sense of rifles — against all our deadliest sins" — somehow feared to address its author. Yet the letter in which he expresses this notion is most interesting.

Oct. 7 '83.

The worry of Ruskin with *Leaves of Grass* is that they are *too personal*, too emotional — launched from the fires of *myself*, my special passions, joys, yearnings, doubts appetites &c &c: — which is really what the book is mainly for (as a type however for those passions, joys, workings &c in *all the race*, at least as shown under modern & especially American auspices).

Then I think he winces at what seems to him the *Democratic* brag of L. of G.

I have heard from R. several times through English visitor friends of his — It is quite certain that he has intended writing to me at length — & has doubtless made draughts of such writing — but defers & *fears* — & has not yet written.

R. like a true Englishman evidently believes in the high poetic art of (only) making abstract works, poems, of some fine plot or subject, stirring, beautiful, very noble, completed within their own centre & radius, & nothing to do with the

poet's special personality, nor exhibiting the least trace of it — like Shakspere's great unsurpassable dramas. But I have dashed at *the greater drama going on within myself & every human being — that is what I have been after.*[1]

W. W.

Among the readers of Dr. Bucke's book was Lafcadio Hearn, then a struggling journalist in New Orleans. He had already been a correspondent of O'Connor's, and recognized the latter's influence in the new volume. One of his letters about Whitman is so typical of the feeling of many of the younger literary men during the eighties that a considerable portion of it may be given here: —

278 Canal Street,
New Orleans, La. Aug. $\frac{9}{83}$

My dear Mr. O'Connor,

. . . Your beautiful little book — I say *your*, because I cannot verily distinguish any other *personality* in it — came like a valued supplement to an edition of *Leaves of Grass* in my library. I have always *secretly* admired Whitman, and would have liked on more than one occasion to express my opinion in public print. But in journalism this is not easy to do. There is no possibility of praising Whitman unreservedly in the

[1] Unpublished.

ordinary newspaper, whose proprietors always tell you to remember that their paper "goes into respectable families," or accuse you of loving obscene literature if you attempt controversy. Journalism is not really a literary profession. The journalist of to-day is obliged to hold himself ready to serve any cause, — like the *condottieri* of feudal Italy, or the free captains of other centuries. If he can enrich himself sufficiently to acquire comparative independence in this really *nefarious* profession, — then, indeed, he is able to freely utter his heart's sentiments and indulge his tastes, like that æsthetic and wicked Giovanni Malatesta whose life Yriarte has written.

I do not think that I could ever place so lofty an estimate upon the poet's work, however, as you give, — although no doubt rests in my mind as to your critical superiority. I think that Genius must have greater attributes than mere creative power to be called to the front rank; — the thing created must be beautiful, it does not satisfy me if the material be rich. I cannot content myself with ores and rough jewels: I want to see the gold purified and wrought into marvellous fantastic shapes; I want to see the jewels cut into roses of facets, or turned as by Greek cunning into faultless witchery of nude loveliness. And Whitman's gold seems to me in the

ore: his diamonds and emeralds in the rough. Would Homer be Homer to us but for the billowy roar of his mighty verse — the perfect cadence of his song that has the regularity of ocean-diapason? I think not. And do not all the Titans of antique literature polish their lines, chisel their words according to severest laws of art? Whitman's is indeed a Titanic voice; but it seems to me the voice of the giant beneath the volcano, — half-stifled, half-uttered, — roaring betimes because articulation is impossible.

Beauty there is; but it must be sought for; it does not flash out from hastily turned Leaves; it only comes to one after full and thoughtful perusal, like a great mystery whose key-word may only be found after long study. But the reward is worth the pain. That beauty is cosmical: it is world-beauty: — there is something of the antique pantheism in the book, and something larger too, expanding to the stars and beyond. What most charms me, however, is that which is most earthy and of the earth. I was amused at some of the criticisms — especially that in the *Critic* — to the effect that Mr. Whitman might have some taste for natural beauty, etc., *as an animal has!* Ah! that was a fine touch! Now it is just the animalism of the work which constitutes its great force to me — not a brutal animalism, but a *human* animalism, such

as the thoughts of antique poets reveal to us: the inexplicable delight of being, the intoxication of perfect health, the unutterable pleasure of breathing mountain wind, of gazing at a blue sky, of leaping into clear deep water and drifting with a swimmer's dreamy confidence down the current, with strange thoughts that drift faster. Communion with nature teaches philosophy to those who love that communion; and Nature imposes silence sometimes that we may be forced to think: — the Men of the Plains say little. "You don't feel like talking out there," I heard one say: "the silence makes you silent." Such a man could not tell us just what he thought under that vastness, in the heart of that silence: but Whitman tells us for him. And he also tells us what we ought to think, or to remember, about things which are not of the wilderness but of the city. He is an animal, if the *Critic* pleases, but a human animal — not a camel that weeps and sobs at the sight of the city gates. He is rude, joyous, fearless, artless (to me), — a singer who knows nothing of musical law, but whose voice is as the voice of Pan. And in the violent magnetism of the man, the great vital energy of his work, the rugged and ingenuous kindliness of his speed, the vast joy of his song, the discernment by him of the Universal Life, — I cannot help imagining that I perceive some-

thing of the antique sylvan deity, — the faun or the Satyr. Not the distorted Satyr of modern cheap classics: but the ancient and godly one, "inseparably connected with the worship of Dionysus" and sharing with that divinity the powers of healing, saving and foretelling, not less than the orgiastic pleasures over which the androgynous god presided.

Thus I see great beauty in Whitman, great force, great cosmical truths sung of in mystical words, but the singer seems to me nevertheless *barbaric*. You have called him a bard. He is! But his bard-songs are like the improvisations of a savage skald, or a forest Druid: immense the thought! mighty the words: — but the music is wild, harsh, rude, primeval. I cannot believe it will endure as a great work endures: I cannot think the bard is a creator, but only a Precursor — only the voice of one crying in the wilderness — *Make straight the path for the Great Singer who is to come after me!* And, therefore, even though I may differ from you in the nature of my appreciation of Whitman, I love the soul of his work, and I think it a duty to give all possible aid and recognition to his literary priesthood. Whatsoever you do to defend, to elevate, to glorify his work you do for the Literature of the Future, for the cause of poetical Liberty, for the cause of mental freedom. Your book is doubly

beautiful to me, therefore; and I believe it will endure to be consulted in future times, when men shall write the "History of the Literary Movement of 1900," as men have already written the *Histoire du Romantisme.*

As time went by, Whitman felt a renewed desire to have a home of his own. His brother and sister-in-law at 431 Stevens Street were most kind. He had particularly loved their infant son Walter, who had been named after him, and there is a peculiar pathos — if one recalls the secrets of his early life — in the old man's sorrow at the child's death. He wrote to Mrs. O'Connor: —

CAMDEN, July 13, (1876)

Nelly this is a sad house today — little Walt died last evening about ½ past 8. Partially sick but sudden at last — suddenly turned to water on the brain — to be buried tomorrow afternoon at 4.

George and Lou are standing it pretty well — I am miserable — He knew me so well — we had already such good times — and I was counting so much.[1]

But completely as he had entered into the troubles or the happiness of his brother's house,

[1] Unpublished letter.

he wanted now to be by himself. In vain did John Burroughs try to persuade him to come to Esopus to live; another friend offered him a house in Philadelphia. He preferred, with the inertia of old age, to "lay up" in Camden. Accordingly he purchased in March, 1884, for $1750, a small two-story house, No. 328 Mickle Street. He had nearly $1300, the proceeds of the Philadelphia edition of 1883, and George W. Childs, with characteristic generosity, loaned him the balance. It was a mean house, upon an unlovely street. Trains jangled and roared at a railroad crossing not far away; when the wind sat in a certain quarter there was a guano factory to be reckoned with. The house was hot in summer, and had no furnace for the winter months. But Whitman was indifferent to its ugliness and discomfort. There was a lilac-bush in the back yard, and that pleased him. After some experiment he secured as housekeeper a widow named Mrs. Mary Davis. Some critics thought her an inefficient manager, although good-natured and faithful according to her lights. Her passion for sewing lace collars on the poet's shirts exceeded, however, her zeal for the broom and dust-pan.[1] A black cat, a spotted dog, a parrot, and a canary, completed the household.

Such was the rather comfortless home which Whitman made for himself at sixty-five, and in

[1] See Appendix.

which he passed the remaining eight years of his life. Here he was visited by hundreds of persons eager to look upon his very noble face and to touch the hand which he used to extend with a royal graciousness. Sometimes they were asked to partake of one of his simple meals. Some of them brought little gifts: fruit, or his favorite mixture of coffee, or a bottle of wine. He loved to share these delicacies with the sick and poor of the neighborhood. Painters — Eakins, Herbert Gilchrist, Alexander — painted his portrait; sculptors made busts; photographers, knowing that Heaven might never send them another such subject, photographed him until, as Whitman himself remarked, the very cameras were weary. At first he was occasionally found seated in a chair on the sidewalk in front of his house. Sometimes he would receive callers in the front room downstairs, where many unsold copies of his books were piled. In the later years visitors were shown to the large upper room, where the poet usually sat in a stout oak chair by one of the windows, a gray wolf-skin flung over the back of the chair. Around him was chaos. The dirty floor was littered with newspapers and magazines, articles of clothing, and bundles of old letters and manuscripts, most of these carefully tied up with string. Like the true old bachelor with literary instincts, Whitman was un-

willing that these piles of precious papers should be interfered with by the profane hands of a house-cleaner. His order rooted in disorder stood, and he would usually poke around among the débris with his cane and fish out precisely what he was looking for. Upon chairs and tables lay more papers, shoes, unwashed dishes, and printers' proofs. Trunks and boxes stood against the wall; the bed — very likely not made up — was in the corner; firewood was thrown down by the air-tight, sheet-iron stove. He had a few books, most of them old friends, like that stout edition of Walter Scott preserved since boyhood. Here was Buckley's translation of Homer, and John Carlyle's Dante, Felton's *Greece*, Ticknor's *Spanish Literature*, George Sand's *Consuelo*, — whose heroine he thought superior to any of Shakespeare's, — Emerson, Ossian, Omar Khayyám and Epictetus, Shakespeare, and a Bible which he had kept throughout his life. Many photographs of friends and celebrities were upon the walls.

But nothing within the littered, low-ceilinged room was worth a glance compared with the figure of the bard. Always slow of movement and calm in demeanor, he had now settled into the immobility of old age. His body was massive, inert. His hands still showed the clear pink color of the Dutchman. The beard was

white, concealing for the most part the full, free lines of the throat. The face grew more delicately modeled with each year, under the refining, spiritualizing touch of time. The lips were firm to the last; the heavy-lidded gray-blue eyes, no longer lustrous, were patient, pensive. As the glistening white hair grew thin, that wonderful domed head seemed to take on a dignity and beauty as of some heroic, vanished epoch; it was a presence of such benignity and serenity as the New World, since Emerson's passing, could not elsewhere show.

Many a pilgrim came to that grimy Mickle Street shrine, much as Alcott, Thoreau, and Emerson had journeyed on a like quest to the Brooklyn tenement, forty years before. Often they came from over-seas. Now it was Henry Irving and Bram Stoker; admiring, as most actors have admired, Whitman's instinct for the histrionic. Hither came Edmund Gosse, Justin M'Carthy, and Dr. Johnston of Bolton, who have left close memoranda of their impressions; Ernest Rhys, H. R. Haweis, and Edward Carpenter for his second visit. Sir Edwin Arnold was another guest. John Morley and Lord Houghton had come earlier. Oscar Wilde, too, "a great big splendid boy," had arrived in 1882 in the height of his "æsthetic" lecture season, for a two-hours' talk and a milk punch with

Whitman, much to the joy of newspaper humorists.[1] Or the caller might be a tramp, an anarchist, a socialist, a Japanese art-student, an enthusiastic college girl. The old Washington friends — Burroughs, Eldridge, O'Connor, Doyle — stopped over in Camden when they could, although this was seldom.

Gradually a new set of guardsmen gathered around the poet. William Sloane Kennedy, who had made Whitman's acquaintance in 1880, while working on a Philadelphia newspaper, became a frequent visitor, and an active correspondent and controversialist in his behalf.[2] Other Philadelphia journalists, like Mr. Talcott Williams, Mr. Harrison Morris, and Thomas Donaldson, served Whitman in many ways, as did Mr. Francis Howard Williams and Mr. R. Pearsall Smith. A warm friendship sprang up between Whitman and Colonel "Bob" Ingersoll, a big-hearted lawyer and orator, famous in his day as a "skeptic." But the most intimate of the new friends came to be Mr. Horace Traubel, a young man who had fallen under Whitman's spell upon the poet's first arrival in Camden. During Whitman's last

[1] Helen Gray Cone's "Narcissus in Camden," published in *The Century's* department of Bric-a-Brac in November, 1882, was a witty parody of the supposed conversation of two poseurs.

[2] See his *Reminiscences of Walt Whitman*, Paisley and London, 1896.

years Mr. Traubel was tireless in his attendance; he founded a Walt Whitman Club, and afterwards the Walt Whitman Fellowship, as well as *The Conservator*, a journal which is devoted largely to the Whitman propaganda. For years he kept a note-book in which he set down impartially everything that fell from Whitman's lips; and he has already begun to publish these conversations.[1] Together with his brother-in-law, Mr. Thomas B. Harned, and Dr. R. M. Bucke, Mr. Traubel became Whitman's literary executor. Students of Whitman will inevitably differ here and there with his biographers upon questions of proportion and of taste; but of Mr. Traubel's loyal discipleship it is impossible to speak too highly.

The external events of Whitman's closing years were few. Many simple pleasures were made possible for him through the kindness of the friends who have already been mentioned. In 1885, for example, as his lameness increased, subscriptions, limited to ten dollars, were asked for the purchase of a horse and buggy. The necessary amount was instantly made up. Florence, Barrett, and Booth among actors, George H. Boker, Mr. Wayne MacVeagh, Mr. Talcott Williams, and Mr. Charles Emory Smith among

[1] *In re Walt Whitman*, Philadelphia, 1893; *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, Boston, 1906.

well-known Philadelphians; Mr. Gilder, Mr. Clemens, Warner, Holmes, Whittier, and John Boyle O'Reilly among writers elsewhere, thus testified their personal good-will for the infirm poet.[1]

On April 15, 1886, Talcott Williams and Thomas Donaldson arranged for the delivery of the Lincoln lecture in the Chestnut Street opera house in Philadelphia. There were generous subscriptions from Dr. Weir Mitchell, Mr. Furness, Boker, and others, in addition to the sale of admission tickets, so that a total of nearly seven hundred dollars was realized. Whitman declared it "the biggest stroke of pure kindness and concrete help I have ever received." In December the *Pall Mall Gazette* of London, upon a rumor that Whitman was starving, raised one hundred and twenty-five pounds for him, and in the same month Mr. Sylvester Baxter, a Boston friend, sought through Congressman Lovering to secure a pension for the poet, on the ground of his services to soldiers during the Civil War. The attempt was unsuccessful.

On Washington's Birthday, 1887, Whitman was greatly pleased with a reception in his honor at the Contemporary Club of Philadel-

[2] Many of their letters are printed in T. Donaldson's *Walt Whitman, the Man*, ch. ix.

phia. In the following April, through the efforts of R. Pearsall Smith and J. H. Johnston, the New York jeweler, Whitman read the Lincoln lecture at the Madison Square Theatre in New York. The audience included Mr. Clemens, Bunner, Stockton, Mr. Conway, John Hay, Edward Eggleston, Mr. St. Gaudens, President Gilman, and many others. Lowell and Mr. Norton, Mr. Burroughs, Mr. Gilder, and Mr. Stedman were in boxes. Mr. Andrew Carnegie wrote, enclosing a cheque for $350 for a box: "When the *Pall Mall Gazette* raised a subscription for Mr. Whitman, I felt triumphant democracy disgraced. Whitman is the great poet of America so far." [1] He was honored with an evening reception at the Westminster Hotel, and was surprised at the universal friendliness manifested. Here is a cheerful letter [2] about it addressed to Eldridge, who was now settled in California:

328 Mickle Street
CAMDEN NEW JERSEY April 21 '87

Dear C W E yours came this forenoon, & was read & re-read, & dispatched on the round to Kennedy, John Burroughs & Dr. Bucke — all so anxious to get definite news from William.[3]

[1] See Kennedy's *Reminiscences*, p. 29. [2] Unpublished.
[3] William O'Connor, already suffering from a malady that proved fatal in 1889.

It somehow seems the most encouraging yet — God grant our dear friend may indeed get complete recovery. Write often as you can, dear friend. With me and my affairs no great ripple. I am worldlily comfortable & in good physical condition as usual of late. I went on to New York — was convoyed by my dear old Quaker friend R Pearsall Smith, had a success at the lecture 14th (netted 600 for myself. Andrew Carnegie gave $350 for his box) — had a stunning *reception*, I think 300 people, many ladies, that evng Westminster Hotel — newspapers friendly everybody friendly even the authors — and returned here Friday 4 p m train from N. Y. in good order. Am going over to Phila. this p m to be *sculp'd* by St Gaudiens [*sic*] the N Y sculptor who has come on, to do it. Signs of spring rather late, but here. I am called to dinner (baked shad)

WALT WHITMAN.

CHARLES W. ELDRIDGE
P. O. Box 1705
Los Angeles California.

In the autumn of this year some Boston friends raised a fund of eight hundred dollars for Whitman. "What we want to do," wrote Mark Twain in sending a generous contribution, "is to make the splendid old soul comfortable." In 1888 his sixty-ninth birthday was celebrated

by a reception and dinner at Mr. Harned's house in Camden. Whitman was in gay spirits. Four days later he suffered a succession of slight paralytic shocks. Dr. Osler, who was called to attend him, was non-commital; but his friends were seriously alarmed.[1] A strong young man was engaged as his nurse, for he was no longer able to move without assistance. The horse and buggy were sold; Whitman made a new will; and it seemed as if the end were drawing near. But in spite of another attack in November, his wonderful recuperative powers asserted themselves once more. The winter dragged by. Whitman's letters and postal cards to his friends took on even more than ever the form of sick-room bulletins. On May 9 another sorrow came: O'Connor died in Washington after a long and painful illness. He was but fifty-seven.

On May 31, 1889, Whitman's seventieth birthday was celebrated by his friends and neighbors in a public hall at Camden.[2] The list of speakers and of senders of congratulatory letters and telegrams included many of the day's distinguished names. In April, 1890, he read

[1] The daily incidents of Whitman's life between March 28 and July 14, 1888, are set forth with great particularity in Horace Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden.*

[2] For a full account of the speeches and messages delivered at this dinner, see *Camden's Compliments to Walt Whitman*, Philadelphia, 1889.

his Lincoln lecture for the last time, at the Contemporary Club rooms, and he was able, in May, to attend the birthday dinner in his honor at Reisser's restaurant in Philadelphia. Thirty persons were present, among them Ingersoll, who spoke, with even more than his wonted eloquence, for forty-five minutes. Afterwards, sitting opposite Whitman, he held a long discussion with him on immortality, the orator finding no evidence for it, and the poet asserting it with a tenacious instinct. Reporters scribbled shorthand notes while the two celebrities debated. On October 21, 1890, Whitman made his last public appearance, as the guest of honor at a lecture delivered for his benefit by Ingersoll at Horticultural Hall, Philadelphia. The address, afterward printed under the title *Liberty in Literature*,[1] was an apologia for Whitman's career. The poet had been wheeled on the stage in an invalid's chair, and at the conclusion of Ingersoll's fervid oratory the bard said a few words of thanks to the audience. Then he was wheeled back to a half-lighted hotel dining-room, where he sat late with Ingersoll, munching a little bread dipped in champagne and talking about Death. He had never been more picturesque.

There was one more birthday dinner, celebrated with many friends in the Mickle Street

[1] See *In Re Walt Whitman*, p. 253.

house on May 31, 1891.[1] Whitman was seventy-two. That privacy which is the normal privilege of old age was one of the many kinds of happiness which he did not experience. Public interest in him seemed to increase, through these last years. Newspapers found him good "copy," and diligent stenographers took down his private as well as his public talk. He was no longer able to compose save with the greatest difficulty. Yet even in his extreme feebleness in 1888, he had prepared for the press his *November Boughs*, a miscellaneous collection of verse and prose. The poems are grouped under the title "Sands at Seventy." None of them are as notable as the prose piece "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," which sums up his plans and endeavors as a poet, and which is now fitly printed as an appendix to his complete poetical works. Of the other prose pieces, the most interesting are the sketches of Elias Hicks and George Fox. The narrative of Hicks's life carried him back to his own earliest boyhood, and he found in the "noiseless silent ecstasy" of the Quaker mystic and in his distrust of all religious organizations, a spirit akin to his own. He writes, for example, to William O'Connor: —

[1] A full stenographic account is given in *In Re Walt Whitman*, p. 297.

CAMDEN p. m. April 18 '88

DEAR W. O'C.

Your kind good copious letter came today & has been read and reread. Nothing new in the monotony of my life — I have rec'd a good plaster bust of Elias Hicks, (size inclined to colossal) wh' I have put open in the corner of my room — & I think it does me good — perhaps *needful* almost to me — Elias at the latent base was *sentimental-religious* like an old Hebrew mystic — & though I may have something of that kind way in the rear, it is pretty far in the rear & I guess I am mainly sensitive to the wonderfulness & perhaps spirituality of things *in their physical & concrete expressions* — and have celebrated all that.[1]

Very suggestive, too, in its revelation of Whitman's old-age estimate of spiritual values, is his comparison of George Fox and Shakespeare. George Fox, he declared, stood for the deepest, most eternal thought latent in the human soul. When the richest mere poetry, even Shakespeare's, ceases to satisfy, and all worldly or æsthetic or even scientific values have done their office to the human character, then this overarching thought of God makes itself manifest. "Most neglected in life of all humanity's attributes, easily cover'd with crust, deluded and

[1] From an unpublished letter.

abused, rejected, yet the only certain source of what all are seeking, but few or none find — in it I for myself clearly see the first, the last, the deepest depths and highest heights of art, of literature and of the purposes of life. I say whoever labors here, makes contributions here, or best of all sets an incarnated example here, of life or death, is dearest to humanity — remains after the rest are gone. And here, for these purposes, and up to the light that was in him, the man Elias Hicks — as the man George Fox had done years before him — lived long, and died, faithful in life, and faithful in death." [1]

He had also been able, in 1888, to see through the press a new edition in one volume of his *Complete Poems and Prose*, and to celebrate his seventieth birthday, in 1889, by an autograph edition — the eighth — of *Leaves of Grass*. In 1891 he issued a slender volume of new poems with the pathetic title *Good-Bye, my Fancy*, and in the following year, during his last illness, he was at work upon the ninth edition of *Leaves of Grass* — the fourth of the *Complete Works*. His final composition was "A Thought of Columbus," now published, like Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar," at the end of his poems. A comparison of the two pieces is curiously suggestive.

[1] *Prose Works*, p. 478.

Whitman's conversations during this final period of his life have been put down with complete — and even pitiless — accuracy. He was never a brilliant talker; his mind moved too slowly, and his words were often halting, repetitious, and vague. Endowed with plenty of physical good-nature, he had nevertheless the true prophet's lack of wit and humor in speech; and the seriousness with which he took himself, from first to last, limited his conversational range. But within his range he was constantly saying interesting things. He had, like most men of original powers, a vocabulary of his own, whose characteristics grew more marked with advancing age. Whitman's was homely and hearty, and sometimes had a flash of the phrase-making genius which glows in his earlier verse.

Of literature as an art he had but little to say. "I do not value literature as a profession. I feel about literature what Grant did about war. He hated war. I hate literature. I am not a literary West Pointer; I do not love a literary man as a literary man. . . . It is a means to an end, that is all there is to it." Like all Transcendentalists, he tended to despise form as compared with substance, and though he had meditated long and practiced cunningly upon rhythmical forms, he never talked that sort of "shop." Eloquently as he had written in youth about the

function of the great poet, his conversation revealed but a slender appreciation of the very greatest of the brotherhood. "I don't care much for Milton or Dante." He enjoyed the simplicity of Homer, but Shakespeare was to him something "feudal," remote, "lacking both the democratic and the spiritual." Of Goethe he seems to have known but little. He spoke of Victor Hugo's "insularity;" "I can't swallow Hugo's exaggeration and bombast." Coming from Whitman, that verdict is odd enough; and his judgment of Dr. Samuel Johnson is surely one of the most humorous which literary history records: "I don't admire the old man's ponderous arrogance. . . . He lacks veracity. . . . Dr. Johnson is clearly not our man." Of Sir Walter Scott he usually spoke with affection. His written judgments of Tennyson are shrewd and skillful. Browning "was not for me." Arnold he knew — and despised — as a critic merely. He dismissed Stevenson with a coarse epithet. He did not care for Swinburne's poetry, although when Swinburne, in his reaction from earlier enthusiasm, made his famous attack upon Whitman in the *Fortnightly Review* for August, 1887,[1] the

[1] "But Mr. Whitman's Eve is a drunken apple-woman, indecently sprawling in the slush and garbage of the gutter amid the rotten refuse of her overturned fruit-stall; but Mr. Whitman's Venus is a Hottentot wench under the influence of cantharides and adulterated rum."

latter refused to answer it in the *North American Review*, and contented himself with saying philosophically: "Ain't he the damndest simulacrum!"

Concerning the older generation of American poets, — Bryant, Emerson, Longfellow, Poe, Whittier — he had written with a delicacy of discrimination which has already been pointed out. Of Cooper, too, he used to speak with enthusiasm. He considered Thoreau egotistic. "Thoreau's great fault was disdain — disdain for men: inability to appreciate the average life." Toward Lowell he had a "feeling of indifference;" "he is not likely to be eternally useful." It is unlikely, in fact, that Whitman had ever known much of Lowell's work, for during the eighties he told Mr. W. R. Thayer, who had just read aloud to him the *Commemoration Ode*, that he "did n't know Lowell was a *critter*" — a favorite eulogistic word. But Whitman's opinion of most of his American literary contemporaries was slighting, and was obviously affected by their real or imagined attitude towards his own work. Yet his comments upon Mr. Stedman and Mr. Gilder, who had shown him great consideration, make — as reported by Mr. Traubel — hardly more pleasant reading than his offhand condemnation of men like Mr. Howells, Mr. James, Mr. Norton, Mr. Aldrich, Mr. Cable, and many other honored

names. As his own strength failed, he seems to have grown increasingly suspicious of some cabal against him — as when he wrote that his enemies had been plying Emerson incessantly, and made Emerson afraid to speak out. This was sheer pathological mania of persecution. He distrusted what he called the "New England crowd," "the college men." Part of this was due to the old antagonism of Poe's day between Boston on the one side and New York and Philadelphia on the other; part of it was due to a feeling which many of Whitman's later associates shared, that the cultivated, college-bred person was out of touch with the real forces of American life. Whitman was puzzled and irritated by the academic temper. Professor Corson of Cornell, for example, called upon him and wrote him some cordial letters. "Corson seems to have signal abilities" — said Whitman — "accepts me in a general way, without vehemence. . . . I think Corson is judicial — probably that is what ails him. I like the outright person — the hater, the lover — the unmistakable yes or no. . . . The scholar swells rarely — I may say never — let themselves go."

Precisely here was the old Romanticist's quarrel with Mr. Stedman's essays, Mr. Gilder's poetry, Arnold's criticisms, Booth's acting: they did not "let themselves go." He

cried for inspiration, intoxication of the whirling dervish kind, like those remembered frenzies that had gone to the making of *Leaves of Grass*. Failing to find this in his contemporaries, he fell back upon himself, with a good word for Ingersoll, O'Connor, Symonds, Kennedy, or other "loyal guardsmen." In view of his naturally great powers, his intellectual arrogance is more easily to be pardoned than the morbid vanity which led him to rank his contemporaries according to their opinion of *Leaves of Grass*, thus forming an "our crowd" and a "not our crowd." But it should be remembered that by 1888 he was an old man, and that the close atmosphere of a cult is not healthful for anybody. Neither Luther, Dr. Johnson, nor Goethe — whose table talk we know, and all of whom were men of far stronger character than Whitman — could have passed unharmed through a Camden apotheosis.

The great mass of Whitman's recorded conversations is devoted to personal and literary topics. His callers naturally asked him about himself and about certain books. He touched occasionally, of course, upon the other enduring themes of human intercourse. Like most of the American men of letters, he knew but little of art, either pictorial or plastic, though during the last ten years of his life he had much hap-

piness in thinking of J. F. Millet's paintings, which he had seen in Boston. In the appreciation of music, he did not pass beyond the Italian opera composers whom he had loved in boyhood. Wagner — between whose "music of the future" and his own poetry so many comparisons have been drawn — made little impression upon him. Toward the progress of science, however, Whitman was wonderfully receptive. Without any of the traits that characterize the scientific mind as such, he possessed, as fully as Goethe or Tennyson, an instinctive comprehension of the larger results of the scientific movement, and particularly of the implications of evolution. He liked to talk about such things, in a large, vague way, as befits a poet.

He loved also to brood upon the teachings of German philosophy. Even in his early manhood he had projected a course of Sunday evening lectures upon Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. The misty grandiose outlines of the Hegelian philosophy were particularly congenial to him. But he knew no word of German, and could never have made himself over into a systematic thinker. What attracted him was merely the desultory, second-hand "gossip of philosophy," and it has hitherto proved impossible for any student of that subject to extract from Whitman's writings

and conversations upon it anything approaching a coherent scheme. Thiers once said of Louis Napoleon that he was unable to distinguish between the two verbs *rêver* and *réfléchir*. By this rule, Whitman's philosophizing was only a sort of somnambulism.

Religion was frequently the theme of Whitman's conversation, as of his verse. Unquestionably he was a man of deep primitive religious instincts. Like most poets, he distrusted formal organizations of creed or ritual. One of the partially illegible entries in his early notes is this: "Boldly assume that all the usual priests . . . etc. are infidels, and the . . . are Faithful Believers." No device of your Wanton Gospeller is quite so old as that! But the precise type of Whitman's religion escapes classification. "I am as much Buddhist as Christian, as much Mohammedan as Buddhist, as much nothing as something." It was non-Christian rather than un-Christian. Though there was much in his life as in his poetry that is in true accord with the ethical teachings of Jesus, there is little evidence that Whitman ever consciously apprehended or sympathized with the distinctive doctrines of Christianity. He said to Dr. Bucke in 1880: "I have never had any particular religious experiences — never felt that I needed to be saved — never felt the need of spiritual regeneration — never had any

fear of hell, or distrust of the scheme of the universe. I always felt that it was perfectly right and for the best." Emerson would doubtless have borne virtually similar testimony. Though more profound on its imaginative side, Whitman's religion resembles the sentimental Deism of the eighteenth century, as exemplified in the famous Savoyard Vicar of Rousseau. But as regards the churches and preachers of his day, Whitman's attitude was that of Voltaire rather than that of Jean Jacques. It was the inherited antipathy of his Long Island boyhood, maintained throughout his life. In his youthful notebook he remarks that "the Bible is now exhausted," and speaks of "the castrated goodness of schools and churches." As an old man he was still irritated by "parsons and the police;" he slammed his windows tight on Sunday, to keep out the sound of the bells and choir of a neighboring church. "I always mistrust a deacon; his standard is low. . . . The whole ideal of the church is low, loathsome, horrible."

He was in full sympathy with the doughty "Bob" Ingersoll's anti-Christian crusade: "It does seem as if Ingersoll and Huxley without any others could unhorse the whole Christian giant." He dreamed that a new and better religion would reveal itself to humanity, a religion of a truer brotherhood and comradeship than the world has yet known, and he believed

that *Leaves of Grass*, the herald of the new gospel, was "the most religious book among books, crammed full of faith." Byron, it will be remembered, said much the same thing about *Don Juan*. Whitman's attitude toward the unseen world was always deeply reverent; like most of the mystics, he felt himself immortal, and none of the world's poets have written more majestically and nobly about death and the soul.[1] As he neared his own end, he gave repeated expression to his sense of the evanescence of those material things which he had once chanted so robustly. When the German Emperor lay dying with cancer of the throat in 1888, Whitman exclaimed: "Lay not your treasures up upon the earth! God knows! no one ever heard me preach against life — its final joyous realities: yet the physical ingredients of life, the things we often set the most store by, are perishable, perishable, perishable! We have them in our hands! It all comes on such fast feet! I do not say all is vanity: I only say certain things are vain. I have seemed to enter into the tragedy of Unser Fritz — to have felt the flame of the fire that is consuming him."

It is for such utterances as these that his

[1] See the admirable collection of his utterances on these subjects, entitled *The Book of Heavenly Death*, edited by Horace Traubel. Portland, Mosher, 1905.

daily talk will be read; and not for any concrete wisdom about politics or human society. Radicals and conservatives, anarchists and socialists alike have found comfortable doctrine in his conversations as in his books. He was a stalwart Free Trader, for example, on grounds transcending party advantage or even considerations of national prosperity. He was not afraid of the logical consequences of his doctrine of the essential brotherhood of all men. There was no better Internationalist. No man spoke more strongly concerning the corruption that flourished in our political life after the close of the Civil War. But the fact remains that his manner of life had left him ignorant of many of the vital forces of his own day. Wholly aside from his long invalidism, he was too self-centred in his later years to be aware of what was actually going on around him. "Give those boys a chance," he said to Dr. Johnston of Bolton, concerning some urchins who were swimming in the Delaware River, "and they would develop the heroic and manly, but they will be spoiled by civilization, religion and the damnable conventions. Their parents will want them to grow up genteel." This was to misunderstand both the parents and the boys. In such respects Whittier knew the American people much better than Whitman.

Indeed many of Whitman's contemporaries had a far more accurate knowledge than he concerning the significant social, educational, and political movements of the day. Mr. Clemens and Mr. Stedman, for example, or John Hay and George William Curtis, have had a truer perception of American life as a whole. Like many Bohemians, Whitman was unaware that his quest for a fuller, freer life had in reality closed more doors of human experience than it had opened. He was a gifted spectator, but he could not quite understand some of the men who flung themselves into the struggle which he was merely watching. He was incapable of estimating such contemporary work as was done by Curtis for decency in politics, by President Eliot for reality in education, and by Phillips Brooks for spirituality in religion. Such men were "gentlemen," and Whitman seemed irritated by the fact that the gentleman may preserve every valuable trait of the man, and add thereto; that the gentleman, in short, is the better product. In such ways did the "free old hawk" pay the penalty of his detachment. Wide human wisdom, many-sided contact with a ripened civilization, or even the intimate joys and sorrows of the home, as they are revealed in such books as Lockhart's *Scott* or Sir Walter's own *Journal*, are not to be looked for in the Bard of Camden.

He was, rather, at his best, like Montaigne and all the great literary egotists, when he was talking about himself. To the very close, in spite of actual suffering and the more trying strain of twenty years of invalidism, he kept up good heart. His faith in the permanence of his own work rarely wavered. He said late in life to Professor G. H. Palmer: "There are things in *Leaves of Grass* which I would no sooner write now than cut off my right hand, but I am glad I printed them." About six months before his death he told Mr. W. R. Thayer that he had been reading over *Leaves of Grass;* "and for the first time," he said, "I have had a doubt as to whether that book will live." But such moods were fortunately transient. Of his earliest life he spoke little. In 1880, talking with Dr. Bucke, he alluded to the fact of his not marrying: "I had an instinct against forming ties that would bind me." To Mr. Talcott Williams, however, he remarked: "I once thought wedlock not needful to my development, but now I think it would have been better for me." The secretiveness which lurked deep in him lasted to the close. Many friends who contributed, out of slender means, towards providing the comforts necessary for an aged man, seriously ill, were surprised to find that in 1891 he had spent nearly $4000 upon a massive tomb in Harleigh

Cemetery, and that during his last illness, when he was supposed to be penniless, he had several thousand dollars in the bank.[1]

Almost insensibly his long years of invalidism lapsed into a final period of swifter dissolution. In December, 1891, pneumonia set in, and a general breaking-up followed. But he lingered until the 26th of March, much of the time in great pain. Then, very quietly at the last, in the darkening close of a soft, rainy Saturday afternoon, he slipped away. Upon the following Wednesday he was buried in the tomb he had built for himself in Harleigh Cemetery. During the middle of the day thousands of people streamed through the Mickle Street house to look for the last time upon Whitman's wonderful face. His friends thought it inappropriate that the funeral services should be conducted by a Christian minister. The ceremonies, which were held under a tent near the tomb, in the presence of a great company, consisted of readings by Mr. Francis Howard Williams from Whitman, Confucius, Gautama, Jesus, the Koran, Isaiah, St. John, the Zend Avesta, and Plato, together with affectionate tributes spoken by Mr. Thomas B. Harned, D. G. Brinton, Dr. Bucke, and Robert G. Ingersoll. Mr. Aldrich, Mr. Stedman, and Mr. Gilder sent wreaths of ivy and laurel for the coffin. Other well-known

[1] See Appendix.

men of letters, with Camden and Philadelphia friends, acted as pall-bearers. The day, which had been overcast, proved fair and mild; the first bluebirds sang while the strange ceremony proceeded. Peter Doyle sat on the grassy slope outside the tent, not listening to the oratory. Peanut venders moved among the outskirts of the crowd. It was a Camden holiday. But Whitman's disciples were profoundly moved. "We are at the summit," said one. "I felt as if I had been at the entombment of Christ," wrote another. Others thought, perhaps remembering the poet's own serene conviction of immortality, that he really was not dead at all, and that in some new guise he would come again. For such as these the spell woven by Whitman's unique personality was unbroken by his bodily death.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER FIFTY YEARS

"My book [*Peer Gynt*] *is* poetry; and if it is not, then it will be. The conception of poetry in our country, in Norway, shall be made to conform to the book." — IBSEN to Björnson, December 9, 1857.

"The only poetry that, in the long run, 'humanity will not willingly let die' is that which contains not mere variations on the old themes, but 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.'" — EDWARD CAIRD, *Essay on Wordsworth.*

"To-day, in books, in the rivalry of writers, especially novelists, success (so-called) is for him or her who strikes the mean flat average, the sensational appetite for stimulus, incident, persiflage, etc., and depicts, to the common caliber, sensual, exterior life. To such, or the luckiest of them, as we see, the audiences are limitless and profitable; but they cease presently. While this day, or any day, to workmen portraying interior or spiritual life, the audiences were limited, and often laggard — but they last forever." — WALT WHITMAN, *Democratic Vistas.*

IT is already more than half a century since the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass.* In the history of world-literature, fifty years is but an insignificant space. In the history of American letters it is a long period, al-

though during that interval, singularly enough, no new name has by common consent been adjudged worthy to stand with those of Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Poe, and other writers, all of whom had produced mature work before 1855. The period has been marked, however, by extraordinary intellectual and material changes, and there has been a constant, if unconscious, shifting of literary perspectives. New questions have arisen, and some of the old questions have altered in significance. Although *Leaves of Grass* is in its essence one of those profoundly imaginative books which cannot be comprehended except through the responding imagination of the reader, one may nevertheless perceive its drift more clearly than was possible a half century ago.

Its author attempted, as we now know, to portray the emotions of a representative man in an age of science and democracy. In the very formality and comprehensiveness of this effort there lurked a danger, — the danger which Balzac encountered in the *Comédie Humaine* and Zola in his *Rougon-Macquart* series of novels. Such a task transcends, in truth, the imaginative power of any one artist. Mr. Swinburne, writing in 1872,[1] — after the first rapture of his discovery of Whitman was over, and before

[1] In *Under the Microscope.*

the revulsion betrayed in his *Fortnightly Review* article began, — said very keenly: "There are in him two distinct men of most inharmonious kinds; a poet and a formalist. . . . Never before was high poetry so puddled and adulterated with mere doctrine in its crudest form. . . . It is when he is thinking of his part, of the duties and properties of a representative poet, an official democrat, that the strength forsakes his hand and the music ceases at his lips." But this very alloy in Whitman's work makes the difficult business of analysis somewhat more easy. The development of science and the world-wide spread of democracy are the two most striking tendencies of the last half-century. They compel attention, whether one will or no, and they have increasingly forced the literary world to take account of a man who assumed the gigantic rôle of speaking in poetry for both science and democracy. Whatever the verdict upon Whitman's performance, it is apparent that he has great allies; that his writings were in accord with some of the most profound world-movements of his day. No critic who endeavors seriously to assess the spiritual forces that are shaping our contemporary life can overlook Whitman's contribution. Even those judges who deny him the name of poet have often admitted that there is no American writer more likely to

be reëxamined, from time to time, by future historians of literature.

Without entering, however, upon the uncertain territory of the future, it is already clear that Whitman stood in certain well-defined relations to the thought and the literature of the past. In the instinctive operations of his mind he was a Mystic, — one of the persons who in every age and in every variety of formal religious faith have been innately and intensely conscious of the reality of spiritual things. In his capacity for brooding imaginative ecstasy he was Oriental rather than Western. Deep affinities allied him with the oldest literatures of our Indo-European race; his own poetical style was formed largely upon that of the Old Testament: he read Hindu and Persian poets in the best translations available, carried Alger's *Oriental Poetry* to the Washington hospitals to read to wounded soldiers, and made many notes, it is said, in his own copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*.[1] His fondness

[1] Emerson once remarked smilingly to F. B. Sanborn that *Leaves of Grass* was a combination of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the New York *Herald*. Compare, for example, Whitman's well known use of the communal "I" with Krishna's speech in the ninth chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "I (*ego*) who am present everywhere in divers forms. I am the immolation. I am the whole sacrificial rite. I am the libation offered to ancestors. I am the drug. I am the incantation. I am the sacrificial butter also. I am the fire. I am the incense. I am the father, the mother, the sustainer, the grandfather of the uni-

for naming himself in his verse, his dervish-like passion for the endless Open Road, and even his catalogue method, have been noted as having singularly close parallels in the poetry of the East.

Whitman's European kinship was with the Romanticists. That stout volume of Sir Walter Scott, it will be remembered, was his "inexhaustible mine and treasury for more than fifty years." Few of the spiritual children of Rousseau, whether upon the Continent or in England, have borne so striking a resemblance to their parent. Whitman read Rousseau early, and planned a poem about him, although he never wrote it. Both men were sentimentalists, by nature sensuous and egotistic. Both were rhapsodists, uttering wonderfully fine things about nature, education, religion. Each had the true mystic's incapacity for exact thought, joined with an intuitive perception of some very vital

verse — the mystic doctrine, the purification, the syllable 'Om!'" etc, etc. Or again, in the tenth chapter: "Know that among horses I am Uchchaishshravasa, sprung from ambrosia; Airavata among elephants, and among men, the King. . . And I am the procreator, Kandarpa. Among serpents, I am Vásuki. . . . I am the Ganges among rivers. . . . I am also eternal time. . . . And I am Death, who seizes all, and the Birth of those who are to be. . . . I am the game of dice among things which deceive; splendor itself among splendid things. . . . I have established, and continue to establish all the universe by one portion of myself."

Translation of J. C. Thomson, Hertford, England, 1855.

truths. They were alike in their earnestness as in their morbid self-consciousness. Each experienced a "revelation" which altered the whole aspect of life, the transparent summer morning described in *Leaves of Grass* being as epoch-making for Whitman, as was that hot walk of Rousseau to Vincennes in 1749, when, meditating on the question proposed by the Academy of Dijon for a prize essay, he suddenly "saw another world and became a new man." Whitman had the sounder body and the more normal mind, yet both men shared a suspicion of the cultivated world into which they were not born, a hatred of restraint, a sort of nomadic irresponsibility. Some Ishmaelite of an ancestor transmitted to them a strain of the tramp, if not of the dead-beat. The curious-minded may trace these personal likenesses into such details as their common passion for music, for fastidious cleanliness of body, and even for carefully selected shirts. Each man wrote superbly about paternity, although neither man, as far as is now known, ever acknowledged or supported the children which he says were born to him.[1]

In their writings, too, as in their lives, they plucked at the same vibrating, plangent strings. "Back to nature" was the burden of their chant; back to the "natural man," to the ego stripped of all artificial and social disguises. To

[1] See Appendix.

their common "*culte du moi*" both Rousseau and Whitman brought an enthusiasm, an exaltation, a sort of inwardness, which not only placed them among the foremost of literary autobiographers, but has given them a passionate personal following. Those sinuous, lambent prose sentences of Rousseau have their counterpart in the flowing rhythms of Whitman's verse. Each of them wrote like a true "orator," — to use Blake's term, — with an ear tuned to the larger effects, and chiefly regardful of sonority, color, and movement. Both composed slowly and with difficulty, but with an inner heat that fused the stubborn words until they flowed at last in glowing eloquence. Both might well declare, like their kinsman Byron, "description is my forte." Yet it is to their enduring honor that they described, not merely the picturesque and sublime in external Nature, and the haughtiness or shamelessness of their own selves, but also the sensations and emotions of the great multitude of common men. Whitman's collected poems now begin with the lines:

"One's self I sing, a simple separate person
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse."

The literary ancestry of both of these lines runs straight to Jean Jacques. The first recalls the Rousseau of the *Confessions* as depicted in its celebrated opening passage; the second line

of Whitman's two-fold theme gives us the Rousseau of the *Contrat Social*. There, for the first time in Europe with anything like equal power, was the vision of the vast masses of European society, the millions who tilled the fields and filled the battle-trenches. It is the reality of this illimitable background which vitalizes the fantastic theory of origins which the *Contrat Social* sets forth. The invented history and economics and philosophy of that famous treatise are absurdly wrong: yet it re-made European politics by means of its passionate feeling for the labor and sorrow and gladness of the people as a whole. Whitman's imaginative vision of the body politic was equally real, equally sympathetic. "*Plowing up in earnest the interminable average fallows of humanity* — not good government merely, in the common sense — is the justification and main purpose of these United States." The difference between the two seers was that Rousseau, with a scanty faith in human improvement, put the golden age behind us, whereas Whitman, writing after a century of democratic change and scientific advance, was prophet enough to see that the true harvest from the interminable fallows lies yet in the future.

Being thus a Mystic by temperament and a Romanticist by literary kinship, Whitman came to intellectual maturity, as we have seen, in the

period of American Transcendentalism. Both the mysticism of the Orient, and the extremer forms of German and English romanticism, found congenial soil in Concord and Cambridge, in Philadelphia and New York. The periodical literature of the forties was Whitman's only university, so far as intellectual stimulus was concerned. To the twentieth century reader, many aspects of this literature seem as fantastic as anything in *Leaves of Grass*. Margaret Fuller's *Dial*, the Fourierite and perfectionist journals, even the files of *Fraser's* and *Blackwood's*, contain the extremest assertion of unchecked individualism, and a total disregard of conventional forms. "Natural-supernaturalism" was in the air, and the impulse was to strip off shams and clothes together — all the hampering garments of civilization — and to leave the "natural man" free. To appreciate *Leaves of Grass* as a product — although, as has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, a belated product — of Transcendentalism, one should read it, not after a course in Nietzsche and Ibsen, much as they enforce and illuminate its teaching from various points of view, but after Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and Emerson's *Essays* and Thoreau's *Journal*. Its eccentricities, like its nobleness, are a part of the sansculottism and the exaltation of the time.

It should not be forgotten, however, that

Leaves of Grass, so far as it has been read at all by the American public, has been read by two generations which have not troubled themselves about its Transcendental origins and affinities. In the ten years following the Civil War, when Whitman's fame was growing rapidly abroad, and far more slowly in his own country, the literature of the forties already seemed remote. The readers who glanced at *Leaves of Grass* — and most readers have done so at one time or another — received a shock, not so much from its Transcendental individualism, as from its evident strangeness of form and its naturalistic dealing with sex. These have been the two chief obstacles to the popular acceptance of Whitman's work. In connection with each of them, the years have gradually brought the conditions for a more sympathetic judgment.

So far as form is concerned, it is clear that since the middle of the nineteenth century there has been a fairly steady progress toward a greater freedom in the whole field of æsthetic sympathy. The sudden expansion of sympathetic feeling toward the wilder aspects of Nature, which marked the latter part of the eighteenth century in England and elsewhere, has since then been paralleled in the field of painting, of music, and of the other arts. A generation trained to the enjoyment of Monet's landscapes, Rodin's sculptures, and the

music of Richard Strauss will not be repelled from Whitman merely because he wrote in an unfamiliar form. The modern tendency to emphasize what is significant or characteristic in the work of art, — perhaps to a too complete exclusion of the question of merely formal beauty, — has been favorable to all the great Romanticists, Whitman included. Expansions and contractions of æsthetic sympathy are among the constantly recurring phenomena with which literature has to deal, but there seems to be no immediate prospect of any such Classical reaction as would create a new impatience with Whitman's irregularities of form.

Indeed, the increased knowledge of the structure of many types of world-literature, differing widely from the conventional verse forms of Western Europe, and yet satisfying the æsthetic sense, has rendered our critical formulas more flexible. When *Leaves of Grass* was written, the poetical books of the Old Testament, to which Whitman was chiefly indebted for his scheme of rhythm, were rarely spoken of as poetry at all. To-day both the structural features and the Oriental imagery of this Hebrew verse are everywhere recognized by English readers. Other Oriental literatures have grown more familiar than they were a half-century ago, and this literary contact of the East with the West will assuredly become

far closer in the future. All this makes against dogmatism as to what "is poetry" and what "is not poetry." Emotional effect outweighs any *a priori* argument as to the means by which the effect is produced. That Blake is a very eccentric poet seems to our generation a less important fact than that he is felt to be a true poet. We breed too many hybrid plants not to be conscious that there may be hybrid types of literature, not less beautiful and wonderful than the original stocks. In short, the whole contemporary tendency to consider results rather than processes has made it easier for the public to admit that, if to an ever-increasing number of persons Whitman performs the function of a poet, a poet he probably is. If the flying-machine actually flies, how it was built matters little.

The shock resulting from Whitman's peculiarities of form has thus been lessened by a wider familiarity with other poetical forms which differ from the traditional English verse-types, as well as by the tacit assumption that any art-form may be justified by its effects. But the shock has also been diminished by the knowledge that men of other nationalities have accepted Whitman's work as that of a true poet. *Leaves of Grass* has been translated, in whole or in part, into many European languages. These translations are constantly increasing in num-

ber. In Italian and German versions especially, his rhythms seem to me to lose but little, if anything, of their original potency. In this respect he is again like Byron. That a Frenchman or German should find "Mazeppa" more easy to translate than "Lines upon Tintern Abbey," and more interesting as well, does not prove Byron a better poet than Wordsworth. Nor does the Continental curiosity about Poe and Whitman, coupled with indifference to Lowell and Whittier, prove the soundness of the theory that the verdict of foreign contemporaries is likely to be the judgment of posterity. But it does prove in Whitman's case, as with Scott and Byron before him, the presence of a certain largeness and power, a kind of communicative emotion, which far outweighs, with the foreign audience, any delicate command over the last refinements of poetic expression.

His imitators on the Continent, as in England and America, have not thus far been able to bend his bow. Edward Carpenter, who has a message of his own to deliver in Whitmanian verse, has handled the instrument not unskillfully. But most of the experiments in "free verse" make but melancholy reading. Whitman's measures have been used as a megaphone to shout out essentially prose exclamations; freaks and cranks and neurotic women, with here and there

a hot little prophet, have toyed with it, and once in a while a true poet has used it for the utterance of a mood. But they have all lacked Whitman's cunning as signally as they have lacked his strength.

The parodists have, upon the whole, been more just than his admiring imitators. Such craftsmen as Mr. Swinburne, Bayard Taylor, H. C. Bunner and J. K. Stephen have given us the very pulse of the Whitman machine, — that unlucky machine of the "official democrat" which sometimes kept on revolving when the poet was loafing. By skillful use of the catalogue trick, with a few foreign phrases mixed with American slang, a "Camerado" [1] or two, a loose syntax, and plenty of exclamation points, anybody can turn out a fair parody of Whitman. But in such a production as Bunner's "Home Sweet Home (after Whitman)" there is more than this; there is a real, affectionate absorption of Whitman's feeling toward his material; Bunner is not imitating, but actually poetizing, for the moment, as Whitman might have done; and the result, playful as it is, brings us more intimately into the secrets of Whitman's workshop than do the analyses of the critics. It is a pity that Whitman could not have had, like Browning and Tennyson,

[1] A good mouth-filling word which Whitman borrowed, by the way, from Scott's *Kenilworth*.

a sufficient sense of humor to enjoy such happy parodies of himself.

But critics and translators, parodists and imitators alike, in spite of all they have done to familiarize the world with Whitmanian measures, have left to the future the real æsthetic valuation of those measures. In the present state of metrical science no one can say exactly how much influence Whitman has had upon the development of poetical forms. That he has been an enfranchising element seems probable. He was neither, as one school of critics would have it, "above art" and a law unto himself; nor was he by any means the artless unsophisticated rustic, with a large and loving nature, but, as Tennyson said of him to Phillips Brooks, "no poet." Yet we shall not be able to register the precise nature of Whitman's service as a craftsman until we have invented a scheme of notation adequate for the registration of such rhythmical cadences as those in which oratory and highly emotional prose abound. We know and can notate the tunes of verse. We recognize the tunes of speech without agreeing upon any system of notation. But the field of rhapsody, Whitman's "new and national declamatory expression," lying, like the varied aria and recitative of oratorio, and the chant of the church service, somewhere between song and speech, now approximating one type

and now another, has not yet been satisfactorily charted. Nevertheless, while metricists are analysing the process which Whitman employed, lovers of literature, in increasing numbers, have come to recognize the result. "I am a stickler for form in literature," says Mr. Richard Watson Gilder, "and one thing that I admire in Whitman is his magnificent form." [1]

The second obstacle to the popular acceptance of *Leaves of Grass* was its gospel of nudity, —

"Of physiology from top to toe I sing."

And this shock, like the shock caused by eccentricity of form, has grown less with time. Whitman chose deliberately and maintained obstinately the theory that the body is as divine as the soul and that one part of the body is as divine as another. It was a logical consequence of his monistic philosophy. But that was an ill-starred day for the "outsetting bard" when he wrote down, among other notes on English history: "Vates is frequently used for 'poet.' The British Vates were priests and physiologists." In his double rôle of priest and physiologist, Whitman unquestionably wrote a few passages which gave, and still continue to give, great offense to fastidious readers. Yet these passages usually bear

[1] *Camden's Compliments to Walt Whitman*, Philadelphia, 1889.

the mark, not so much of his imaginative energy as of his automatic describing-machine. Here and there is a powerful line or two, not meant and not fit for the young; but of the eighty lines which O'Connor admitted to be objectionable to "malignant virtue," most are as innocent of poetry as a physiological chart. To a healthy-minded person these lines are like accidentally opening the door of the wrong dressing-room: one is amused, embarrassed, disenchanted or disgusted, according to one's temperament and training.

At worst, Whitman was immodest rather than indecent. No reputable critic, considering his writings in their totality, would to-day accuse him of eroticism, although he has sometimes been read, no doubt, by those who are pathologically unfit for that kind of reading. But he has paid, and long will continue to pay, the penalty which attaches to breaches of conventional decorum. In the mystical transport of that first revelation of the essential beauty and sacredness of every natural object and function, he danced as David did before the Ark of the Lord. But the rough and ready police-court judgment of the world considers, not the religious exaltation of the act, but the attendant exposure of the person. The kind Emerson made this perfectly clear, no doubt, in that famous talk upon Boston Common. Whitman went his own way,

and took his chances. "I had my choice," he said, "when I commenced." Yet time, though it has not yet vindicated the wisdom of that choice, has absolved him from the charge of covert suggestion of evil. The "athletic America" of the twentieth century, in full accord with that portion of Whitman's gospel which glorifies the body, can scarcely understand how that gospel was suspected by the white-faced, black-coated, dyspeptic persons who, as Mr. James Ford Rhodes tells us, were the typical Americans of 1855.[1]

It is not that the young athletes of the present day have learned to idolize Whitman either as a man or as a poet. They are often suspicious of his self-consciousness, and they think that he protests too much. Compared physically with a natural, sinewy athlete like Lincoln, Whitman was always "soft." In spite of his big body and his unusual powers of endurance, he was too emotional for the rôle. Nervous invalids like Symonds and Stevenson have found him an immense tonic.[2] The real athletes, like those real working men whom he longed to influence, have

[1] See Rhodes's *History of the United States*, vol. iii, chap. 12.

[2] Symonds testified: "*Leaves of Grass*, which I first read at the age of twenty-five, influenced me more perhaps than any other book has done, except the Bible; more than Plato, more than Goethe." Stevenson spoke of it as "a book which tumbled the world upside down for me."

been inclined to consider him a humbug. But here, as with the questions of form and of morality, time is gradually revealing the truth. No Whitman myth, favorable or unfavorable, can forever withstand the accumulated evidence as to Whitman's actual character. Not in vain was he photographed, reported, advertised, Boswellized. The "wild buffalo strength" myth, which he himself loved to cultivate, has gone; the Sir Galahad myth, so touchingly cherished by O'Connor, has gone, too; and Dr. Bucke's "Superman" myth is fast going. We have in their place something very much better; a man earthy, incoherent, arrogant, but elemental and alive.

He was a man, furthermore, who had something to say. His early notebooks have now revealed the deliberation with which he brooded over his message. His known methods of composition have revealed the extreme care with which he wrote, — his painstaking preparation of lists of words, his patient effort to "make this more rhythmical," and to fit each poem into its place in his vast scheme. He chose for his theme the Modern Man, typified by himself, and placed in the United States of America. No doubt there are defects in his draftsmanship, but upon the whole he drew with splendid justice his picture of the "strong-possessed soul." There

should be first, he claims, a vigorous physical manhood and womanhood; then a courageous heart, and an all-inclusive comradeship. Clean, strong, brave, friendly persons are the test of a civilization. So much for his doctrine concerning the units which form our heterogeneous democratic society.

But how are the units to be organized into "these States"? Here we touch a singular defect in Whitman's mind as well as in his art. He ignored — sometimes consciously, more often unconsciously — those intermediate groups which mark the advance of men into the perfection of organized society. Compare him with another genuinely American and democratic poet, who found, like Whitman, some of his finest themes in politics, and who loved and celebrated the common people. Whittier's roots, like Whitman's, ran deep down in a certain spot of soil, but, unlike Whitman, he was never transplanted and made a wanderer; he sings of fireside, of township and county, of state and section, of church and party and organization, and his note strikes true upon them all; his loyalty to his commonwealth rings harmoniously with his loyalty to the whole country and to the wider interests of mankind, like bells within bells, chiming consonant music. But Whitman's mind passes immediately from the individual to the mass.

He paints men and women, but rarely that transfiguring love of the one man for the one woman upon which rests the family; he writes glorious things about physical fatherhood and motherhood, but little about the home; and upon all those countless fealties of neighborhood, of social, political and religious coöperation, which after all hold our centrifugal individualistic forces together and make common progress possible, he throws but a careless, casual glance. Beyond the unit he knows nothing more definite than his vague "divine average" until he comes to "these States" and finds himself on sure ground again.

I characterize his phrase the "divine average" as a vague one, because he takes no pains to use it consistently. Sometimes, apparently, it means nothing more than a doctrine of numerical ratios, as if there were a sacredness in statistical tables; sometimes it is used to praise the commonplace because it is the commonplace; and then again he fills it with noble significance in making it mean the presence of the divine in every ordinary "average" man and woman. Here is what he says:

"Painters have painted their swarming groups and the centre-figure of all,
From the head of the centre figure spreading a nimbus of gold-colored light,

But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-colored light,
From my hand from the brain of every man and woman it streams, effulgently flowing forever."

This desire of Whitman's to glorify everybody equally is touching in its naïveté; but the aspiration is futile, whether in painting a picture or in depicting democratic society. To paint a picture in that fashion is to overlook the essential process of selection, of composition; to sketch a society on that plan is to ignore spiritual values, degrees of achievement and of growth. Preraphaelite painters may stick little dots of gilt upon a blue ground and call it heaven; and democratic poets may assert that one man is as good as another; but the plain people know better. It would be unfair to say of Whitman, as Emerson did of Gibbon, "The man has no shrine; a man's most important possession." He had altogether too many shrines. Monist as he was in philosophy, he was polytheist in practice: he dropped on his knees anywhere, before stick or stone, flesh or spirit, and swore that each in turn was divine. He would have no hierarchy. The lesson of gradation, taught by the very stars in their courses, he would not learn. The gentleman was no higher than the man, the saint no finer product than the sinner. With a soul that instinctively cried "Glory! Glory!" he never-

theless did not perceive that the glory of the terrestrial was one, and the glory of the celestial was another.

But when he passes to the depiction of the ideal life of the United States, Whitman's grandiose phrases and deep-heaving rhythms, and even the very vagueness of his thought, are suited to his vast theme. First in real significance, I think, though casual readers of Whitman often overlook it, is the emphasis laid, particularly in his later poetry, upon the indebtedness of our Democracy to the Past. "The ship of Democracy," he declares, "bears all the past with it." Our "present is impelled by the past, like a projectile." We are indeed treading the soil of a fresh new world, not "red from Europe's old dynastic slaughter house," and yet

"To obey as well as command, to follow more than to lead,
These are also the lessons of our New World;
With how little the New after all, how much the old, old World.
Long and long has the grass been growing,
Long and long has the rain been falling,
Long has the globe been rolling round."

These States should be free, not bound to the past, though able to profit by it. Whitman pushes this doctrine of liberty very far:

"Resist much, obey little."

In thus emphasizing our American contempt for statutes and ceremonies, Whitman perhaps claims too much for the *laissez faire* theory: but his teaching is interesting in view of the present drift in city, state, and nation toward centralized power.

He insists that democratic America must be religious. "I say that the real and permanent grandeur of these States must be their religion." Exactly what Whitman meant by religion eludes formulation, as we have already seen. But there is no vagueness in his next injunction; namely, that we should avoid sectionalism. His own aim was, he says, "To put the complete union of the States in my songs without any preference or partiality whatever." North and South, East and West, he would "plant companionship thick as trees," he would "found superb friendships." Not in vain had the journeyman printer and carpenter tramped up and down the states of the Union, learning many cities and many men. He did endeavor to speak, in quite as true a sense as Daniel Webster, "for the country and the whole country." And this wholeness was made indissoluble, Whitman believed, by the results of the Civil War. That war was the one great spiritual crisis of his political faith, as was the French Revolution in the experience of Wordsworth. In his later life he came to think that

the war was the "axle" upon which *Leaves of Grass* really turned, and that his book could not be understood without a comprehension of that struggle. Of its pathos, mystery, carnage, jubilant shouts of liberty, he wrote in *Drum-Taps;* and all the tragedy and glory of the four years of conflict were justified, he believed, in the ultimate union of brethren.

Finally, these States, thus united by toil and sorrow and bloodshed and joy, have for their chief task the laying of a foundation for the future. We are still pioneers, the ultimate goal is not reached. But some day there shall be a better civilization here in America, when "the average man is taught the glory of his daily walk and trade," and when the masses of men shall live together in fraternal faith and comradeship.

"In this broad earth of ours, amid the measureless grossness and the slag,
Enclosed and safe within its central heart,
Nestles the seed perfection."

What then should be the message of American Democracy to the world? What may it contribute to "the good old cause, the great idea, the progress and freedom of the race?" Whitman believed that this "good old cause" would always find lovers and, if need be, martyrs here. And therefore he celebrated any movement, the world over, which made for self-government.

This is much: it is more striking now than it was fifty years ago, for self-government has grown in many quarters to seem something old-fashioned, rhetorical, not making for economic efficiency. But Whitman's championship of liberty is not all; he sang, as few poets have sung, the praise of internationalism. He saluted the "flag of man." In one of his prose works he wrote: "I would inaugurate from America international poems. I have thought that the invisible root out of which the poetry deepest in and dearest to humanity flows is friendship. I have thought that both in patriotism and song (even amid their grandest shows past) we have adhered too long to petty limits and that the time has come to enfold the world." Herder said the same thing a century earlier. Whitman clothes the thought in poetry: —

"One thought ever at the fore —
That in the Divine Ship, the World, breasting Time and Space,
All Peoples of the globe together sail, sail the same voyage, are bound to the same destination."

And the goal may be nearer than we have thought: —

"Never were such sharp questions ask'd as this day,
Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God,
Lo how he urges and urges, leaving the masses no rest!

His daring foot is on land and sea everywhere, he colonizes the Pacific, the archipelagoes,
With the steamship, the electric telegraph, the newspaper, the wholesale engines of war,
With these and the world-spreading factories he interlinks all geography, all lands;
What whispers are these O lands, running ahead of you, passing under the seas?
Are all nations communing? is there going to be but one heart to the globe?"

"Every great poet," said Wordsworth in a well-known passage, "is a teacher. I wish to be considered either as a teacher or as nothing."[1] By this test Whitman belongs with the great poets. One cannot go to him for information about the next election, or for panaceas against all the evils with which democracy is fighting in the twentieth century. But his poetry does, in his own words, "free, arouse, dilate" the individual reader. It fulfills what Whitman thought should be the aim of all poetry, namely, — to fill a man "with vigorous and clean manliness, religiousness, and give him good heart as a radical possession and habit." With the natural dogmatism of a good teacher, he held certain views concerning the function of the individual, the function of the United States, and the joy-

[1] Compare a remark of Whitman, late in his life, to Mr. W. R. Thayer: "I don't value the poetry in what I have written so much as the teaching; the poetry is only a horse for the other to ride."

ful message of these States to the world. The value of those views is very slightly affected by the disputable questions about his technical craftsmanship as a poet. One may even go as far as his friend John Burroughs has gone in conceding grave faults.[1] One may admit that Whitman's popular reputation, like Browning's, will always suffer — and justly suffer — because of his artistic shortcomings. "Whether my friends claim it for me or not," he once admitted, "I know well enough that in respect to picto-

[1] "Nothing but the most uncompromising religious purpose can justify certain things in the 'Leaves;' nothing but the most buoyant and pervasive spirituality can justify its overwhelming materiality; nothing but the most creative imagination can offset its tremendous realism; nothing but the note of universal brotherhood can atone for its vehement Americanism; nothing but the primal spirit of poesy itself can make amends for this open flouting of the routine poetic, and this endless procession before us of the common and the familiar.

. . . . . .

"The home, the fireside, the domestic allurements, are not in him; love, as we find it in other poets, is not in him; the idyllic, except in touches here and there, is not in him; the choice, the finished, the perfumed, the romantic, the charm of art and the delight of form, are not to be looked for in his pages. The cosmic takes the place of the idyllic; the begetter, the Adamic man, takes the place of the lover; patriotism takes the place of family affection; charity takes the place of piety; love of kind is more than love of neighbor; the poet and the artist are swallowed up in the seer and the prophet." JOHN BURROUGHS, *Whitman: A Study*, Boston, 1896, pp. 149, 186, and 195 especially.

rial talent, dramatic situations, and especially in verbal melody and all the conventional technique of poetry, not only the divine works that today stand ahead in the world's reading, but dozens more, transcend, (some of them immeasurably transcend) all I have done or could do." But neither the literary deficiencies which he here confesses, nor his faults of personal character, mar the fundamental soundness of Walt Whitman's views concerning those problems of democracy which affect us all. He has pointed out the way to individual manhood, to comradeship, to world-wide fraternity. What matter if he has not all the drawing-room virtues and accomplishments of your finished poet?

Many men know what it is to be lost in the woods. People behave very differently in that predicament. Some persons cry, others swear; some sit down on a log and whistle; others beat around with the guides in search of the lost path. And after a while, one hears some big unkempt guide, circling through the underbrush, cry out "We 're all right! There 's the clearing!" There will always be some delicate-minded excursionist to remark: "That man's voice is too loud. He makes me nervous. The expression 'All right' is slang. He is not wearing a collar! He has been perspiring. I *think* he has torn his trousers!"

It is like the stout, hearty voice of Walt

Whitman, calling out to us who are lost in the brush and the swamp of class hatred, race prejudice, economic injustice and social wrong: "All right! Yonder lies the clearing! There are the sunlit heights of peace and goodwill; and here is the path!" The born disciples of Whitman, hearing that voice, will take up their packs again, and strike into the path behind their leader, were he ten times more disreputable looking than he is. "Never mind the torn trousers," say they, "lift up your eyes and your hearts, and make for the clearing!"

It is plain that to such readers Whitman is more than a mere writer. To them the question whether he wrote poetry or prose counts for nothing compared with the fundamental question whether this was or was not a man with something glorious to say. To vex his message with academic inquiries about the type of literature to which it belongs is like badgering St. Paul about the syntax of his epistle to the Romans. Whitman has become to them no longer a rhapsodist to be read, enjoyed and quoted: he is an ethical force, a regenerator, a spiritual discoverer who has brought them into a new world. It is no wonder that in their enthusiastic personal loyalty they lose all sense of literary proportion, and praise Walt Whitman in terms that would be extravagant even if applied to a poet of the rank of Dante.

No one can read Whitman for twenty-five years, as I have done, without comprehending this feeling. In certain moods, — and these are perhaps the moods of noblest and truest human sympathy, — the recognition of Whitman as a seer and prophet seems the end of the whole matter. But there are other moods, familiar to all who have passed much of their lives in intimate companionship with books, in which the old persistent question reasserts itself, and one asks, whether, after all, there is in Whitman's verse the beauty that outlives the generations and gives poetry its immortality. It happened not long ago that, in examining a bulky collection of newspaper and magazine notices of Whitman, I let one clipping fall to the floor. On the reverse of the slip was printed, as it chanced, Keats's ode "To Autumn," composed on the afternoon of a September Sunday, in the year in which Walt Whitman was born. Involuntarily I murmured those rich lines, at once so perfect in feeling and so flawless in their form. And I asked myself: "Why is it that this poem — relatively empty of ethical significance as it is — is sure to live, while we can only say of Whitman's poetry that some of it ought to live?"

The answer to that question is, I suppose, the inevitable one that Keats was the better artist; that in his hands truth and beauty were wrought

together into forms instinctively precious to men. Whitman, greatly dowered as he was by nature, and far transcending Keats in range of imaginative vision, had but an imperfect control of the recognized instrument of poetry, and the new one that he strove to fashion has not yet been approved by time.

A longer interval than fifty years must elapse before the permanence of this new rhapsodic verse can be adequately tested. But it seems already obvious that page after page of Whitman is doomed to transiency. Byron and Wordsworth, Moore and Southey, have written hundreds of prosaic pages, which are indeed held together by formal verse structure, but which now move no man as poetry. But the disintegration already apparent in *Leaves of Grass* is due not so much to the circumstance that its contents are but imperfectly wrought into the conventional, traditional verse forms. The radical defect is that the raw material of fact is but imperfectly crystallized by the imagination. In passing through the creative imagination of a poet crude fact undergoes a structural change, like iron transmuted into steel. But often, in *Leaves of Grass*, this change has failed to take place.[1] Sometimes

[1] "He lay spread abroad in a condition of literary solution. But there he remained, an expanse of crystallizable substances, waiting for the structural change that never came; rich

it is not only imagination, but even thought that is lacking. "Get from Mr. Arkhurst the names of all insects — interweave a train of thought suitable," is Whitman's notebook formula for composing a proposed poem; but on page after page of *Leaves of Grass* the names of things are prodigally given, while the "suitable thought" remains unexpressed. Like many another mystic, Whitman was, as it were, hypnotized by phenomena, in spite of his conviction that phenomena are only the symbols of the unseen. Such men, when they attempt literature, easily fall into the characteristic error of the realists, and in their anxiety to present the body of whatever fact concerns them, somehow miss its soul. Even in that Brooklyn art lecture of 1851, Whitman fell into the immemorial heresy of identifying nature with art. There is another troubled entry in one of his early notebooks, which goes to the root of the difficulty: "*How shall my eye separate the beauty of the blossoming buckwheat field from the stalks and heads of tangible matter? How shall I know what the life is except as I see it in the flesh.*"

How, indeed! And yet Wordsworth knew how

above almost all his coevals in the properties of poetry, and yet, for want of a definite shape and fixity, doomed to sit forever apart from the company of the Poets."

EDMUND GOSSE, *Critical Kit-Kats*, London, 1896, p. 111.

when he described the daffodils flashing upon the inner eye. Those "stalks and heads of tangible matter" are in truth the perishable portion of *Leaves of Grass*. Its faults of taste and proportion are the familiar faults of the Romantic school. It is at times turgid, sprawling, extravagant; here are bathos and vulgarity; a vanity like Whistler's; Byron's rhymed oratory without even the clever rhymes; Hugo's vague humanitarian theorizing without the sustained sonorous splendor. When the imagination of Byron and Hugo is in full activity, all such faults are carried away as with a flood; they are the merest débris upon its foaming surface. But with Whitman the tangible matter often chokes the imaginative flood; there are too many logs in the stream; the observer and describer are too much for the poet. The trouble with Whitman's agglutinative or catalogue method is not that he makes catalogues, but that the enumerated objects remain inert objects merely. He is often like a yard-man coupling parlor-cars whose names are rich in individual associations — Malvolio, Manitoba, Mazzini, Manchuria, Maria. But however excitedly those musical names are ejaculated, this does not start the train. The difficulty with the comprehensive architectural scheme into which the successive editions of *Leaves of Grass* were slowly fitted is not that it is comprehensive and

architectural, but that the poet, like Fourier and Swedenborg and other system-makers, sub-let so much of his contract to the theorizer. Systems pass, and democracies alter their form and meaning, and the very face of the earth is changed; and yet those lines "To Autumn," improvised by an imagination that perceived not merely the phenomena but the secret spirit of the September afternoon, remain as imperishable as that Grecian urn which Keats himself chose to typify the immutability of beauty.

But Whitman, too, in spite of the alloy which lessens the purely poetic quality and hence the permanence of his verse, is sure, it seems to me, to be somewhere among the immortals. He will survive, not so much by the absolute perfection of single lyrical passages, as by the amplitude of his imagination, his magical though intermittent power of phrase, and the majesty with which he confronts the eternal realities. Upon the whole the most original and suggestive poetic figure since Wordsworth, he gazed steadily, like Wordsworth, upon the great and permanent objects of nature and the primary emotions of mankind. Of the totality of his work one may well say, "The sky o'erarches here." Here is the wide horizon, the waters rolling in from the great deep, the fields and cities where men toil and laugh and conquer. Here are the gorgeous processionals

of day and night, of lilac-time and harvest. The endless mystery of childhood, the pride of manhood, the calm of old age are here; and here, too, at last is the

"Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,"

the hush and whisper of the Infinite Presence.

These primal and ultimate things Whitman felt as few men have ever felt them, and he expressed them, at his best, with a nobility and beauty such as only the world's very greatest poets have surpassed. Numbers count for nothing, when one is reckoning the audience of a poet, and Whitman's audience will, for natural reasons, be limited to those who have the intellectual and moral generosity to understand him, and will take the pains to do so. But no American poet now seems more sure to be read, by the fit persons, after one hundred or five hundred years.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Preface to First Edition, line 30. Mr. Ames wishes me to say that it was his friend Mr. Walter Learned who first pointed out to him this interesting parallelism.

Page 9, *line* 8. I refer here to their childhood only. Both George and "Jeff" Whitman developed into useful and upright citizens. Miss Amy Haslam Dowe, whose aunt married George Whitman, kindly permits me to quote a personal letter to me (July 9, 1907) in which she describes the Whitman brothers: —

"My mother's sister, Louisa Haslam, married Colonel George Whitman, and I would tell you of him, — for few knew him better and none loved him more, — and also of 'Jeff.' Jeff I never knew personally, although I am well acquainted with his daughter Jessie, who still lives in St. Louis. I will, therefore, content myself with quoting from the *Journal of the Association of Engineering Societies* concerning him: —

"'In May, 1867, he accepted the position as chief engineer of our St. Louis Water Works, which were constructed under his skillful supervision, his old friend and former chief, James P. Kirkwood, being consulting engineer.

"'The works were completed and put into service in June, 1871, and with occasional additions to machinery and plant have served our city for nearly twenty years, and stand to-day possibly the best designed, best constructed, and most practical system of water works of any large city west of the Alleghanies. There is his monument.

"'We rejoice in the thought that here was an engineer able, skillful, thorough, and conscientious, who built these works according to true rules, who saw that the city got its full rights under the contracts, whose conduct throughout all obeyed the same plumb and level which he applied to engine and reservoir.'

"To turn now to my uncle, George Whitman, I can speak at first hand.

"In the War, he enlisted as a private soldier, and solely through merit rose to the rank of Colonel. The New York *Times*, of October 29, 1864, under the heading of 'Fifty-First New York City Veterans,' says, 'During the rest of the engagement (Petersburgh) the command devolved upon Capt. George W. Whitman, who was subsequently specially mentioned in the official report of the affair for this and a long previous career of skill and courage as a soldier.' I know, too, that my uncle was presented with a sword by Brooklyn people, for his bravery.

"Yet it was not alone physical prowess that was my uncle's; it was also moral. Soon after the War, he entered the employ of the Metropolitan Board of Water Works of New York City as inspector of pipes, and often had contracts also from other cities. The

contracts were assigned to different foundries, my uncle going from one to another for the inspection. His position offered opportunities for unlimited 'graft,' and more than one inducement was put forth by foundry owners to make him accept thousands of dollars' worth of iron pipes which he had rejected. It was in vain. The absolute incorruptibility of the man came to be recognized by the Water Boards, and when he resigned again and again, as he grew older, the Boards besought him to continue in their employ, even if unable to do the inspecting personally, that the pipes might be marked with the initials 'G. W. W.,' which had come to stand for honesty and perfection.

"Do you wonder, Mr. Perry, that I protest against your remark (page 9), 'None of the children, except Walt, showed any marked intellectual or moral stamina'?

"I must, too, take serious exception to your epithet applied to George Whitman as 'surly.' Silent he was; but surly never.

"My Uncle George was the most silent man I have ever known. He loved solitude or, at most, the companionship of not more than one or two as dearly as his brother the poet loved humanity. Uncle George seldom spoke, but when he did it was always kindly. As a child I spent weeks at a time with this uncle and aunt, and though I was often in mischief, my uncle never scolded me. As I grew older, I came to feel that if there were one chance out of three of my uncle's objecting to anything I wished to do, that

I would leave that thing undone. Moreover, as to the married life of my aunt and uncle, theirs was the most ideally happy one I have ever seen.

"Although I am trespassing at such length upon your time, I would point out a minor error on page 244. My uncle and aunt had only one child, Walter, who lived at all; he died at the age of eight months.

"When we come to the circumstances of 'Uncle Walt's' moving to Mickle Street, I have again something to add. Colonel Whitman, who loved the country, had built a commodious house on the outskirts of Burlington, N. J., and had built it larger than was wished for himself and his wife that they might accommodate 'Uncle Walt.' And to their amazement, when they were about to move to the new house, 'Uncle Walt' declared for the first time (as I remember it) his intention of not accompanying them. Uncle George then offered to build a small house for his brother on the place. Of no avail. Uncle Walt wished to remain in town and remain he did. The only purpose that this living on Mickle Street has served — as far as I can see — is that it has given the world what it always looks for, — the picture of a poet in poverty!

"The failure of Uncle Walt to accompany my aunt and uncle to the country, occasioned, however, no breach between them. He was a constant recipient of their kindness; my aunt constantly visited Uncle Walt, carrying him delicacies, and made with her own hands his invalid's garments. Neither George Whitman nor 'Jeff' would have allowed Walt to

suffer. And while 'Uncle Walt' received whatever was offered to him, he gave as freely. Whenever I visited him, his first thought was always what he could give me, and I still have a copy of his poems which he fished out for me one day from the masses of papers and books on his table, and in which he wrote my name.

"His acceptance of money from his friends was like that of a little child who takes whatever is offered to it, never doubting the propriety of doing so."

Page 27, note. Miss Charlotte E. Morgan, in the *English Graduate Record* of Columbia University (vol. iii, no. 2), points out that the *Columbian Magazine* printed four of Whitman's sketches during 1844: *Eris: A Spirit Record*, in March, *Dumb Kate: The Story of an Early Death*, in May, *The Little Sleighers*, in September, and *The Child and the Profligate*, in October. All of these but *The Little Sleighers* were reprinted in The Brooklyn *Eagle*. Miss Morgan also gives two poems, *Each Has His Grief* and *The Punishment of Pride*, originally printed in *The New World* in 1841.

Page 35, *line* 9. Miss Charlotte E. Morgan finds that this article in the *Broadway Journal* was entitled *Art Singing and Heart Singing*. It appeared on Saturday, November 29, 1845.

Page 43, *line* 19. Professor George R. Carpenter kindly informs me that Whitman's work upon the *Crescent* began with the first issue, March 6, 1848, and that he left New Orleans on May 26, 1848.

Page 44, *line* 25. In the first edition this pas-

sage read: "he was troubled by some lines, and his familiarity with certain passages of Greek literature increased his discomfort. He wrote to Whitman expressing concern, and Whitman, shocked at a misinterpretation of which he had not dreamed," etc. That wording conveyed, I fear, a somewhat misleading impression as to the motive for the correspondence.

Page 78, *line* 14. Mr. Laurens Maynard reminds me that the change of title from *Walt Whitman* to *Song of Myself* was not made until the seventh edition (1881), instead of the "third," as I first stated.

Page 124, *line* 4. In the first edition, this passage read "slender fortune," for which "small savings" is now substituted. I did not then know that the amount concerned was but $200. This is the so-called "Parton incident." I state the facts as they were given to me by the late E. C. Stedman, a friend of both men, who had taken exceptional pains to ascertain the truth; but I was not aware, until after the publication of the first edition, that the incident had already given rise to so much discussion. Since then, many documents bearing upon it have been placed in my hands. To accuse Whitman of dishonesty, deliberate or otherwise, was not my intention. I simply took one instance of a case where Whitman — like Goldsmith and many another honored and beloved man of letters — borrowed money and had no cash wherewith to meet the loan when it was due. At least one other perfectly authenticated instance of his failure to repay a loan might have been given. It was char-

acteristic of Whitman that he persuaded himself that some chattels (pictures) offered in satisfaction of the Parton claim were a full equivalent for the debt. He explained his version of the transaction in a letter to W. D. O'Connor (now in the hands of Mr. Horace Traubel) and inclosed a receipt in settlement, apparently given to him by Dyer, Parton's friend and lawyer. At least, so I am told by persons who have read the letter, which I have not been permitted to see. On the other hand I have abundant written testimony from the Partons that the chattels offered were worthless and that the debt was never paid during Parton's lifetime. He died in 1891. As far as I am able to sift this conflicting evidence, the case seems to turn upon the comparative veracity of Parton and Whitman. It should be added that Whitman grew more careful in money matters as he grew older; and that even in his impecunious Pfaff period there was something endearing in his willingness to share the pocketbook of a friend. Compare the sentence from Miss Dowe's letter, already quoted: "His acceptance of money from his friends was like that of a little child who takes whatever is offered to it, never doubting the propriety of doing so."

Page 135, *line* 6. The first edition read "surly" for "silent." See Miss Dowe's letter, previously quoted.

Page 244, *line* 9. This child, who died at the age of eight months, was an only one.

Page 245, *line* 26. I have modified the somewhat severe judgment, expressed in the first edition, as to

Mrs. Davis's abilities as a housekeeper. My informants were women. But one of Mrs. Davis's friends, Elizabeth Keller, who nursed Whitman in his last illness, writes me that such criticisms are unjust to Mrs. Davis. The picturesque detail of the "lace collar," which was impressed upon several of Whitman's callers, is thus interestingly accounted for by the nurse: —

"Mr. Whitman had six old shirts when I went there. Mrs. Davis had made them some years before. They were of unbleached cotton. On the collar and cuffs of *one* was a little lace. He wore this shirt when he made his last appearance in New York City, and the *Tribune* next morning commented upon it in pleasant words. The old shirts that Mrs. Davis had patched and repatched gave out while I was there, and Mrs. D. made three more, *furnishing the goods out of her own pocket.*"

Page 271, *line* 3. In the first edition this passage ran: "Many friends who contributed, out of slender means, to his weekly support — since his brother George proved unwilling to help him — were surprised," etc. The word "support" was misleading, as Whitman did not lack the bare necessities of life. But he did need the comforts and the nursing which were now provided for him. Thomas B. Harned, Esq., of Philadelphia, one of Whitman's executors, has written me as follows (December 22, 1906) concerning the statements made in the passage under question: —

"The above statement is untrue and misleading.

No one ever contributed to Whitman's 'weekly support' at any time, so far as I have been able to ascertain, — and I have access to original sources of information going back more than forty years. He not only always supported himself, but the evidence is conclusive that he regularly contributed to the support of his Mother and other members of his family. His income, however small, was always sufficient to cover his frugal needs and expenditures. His brother George was not 'unwilling to help him' and, as a matter of fact, was not asked to do so. Three years before he died, he became very ill and we thought the end was near and we telegraphed to Dr. Bucke in Canada. After he rallied, Dr. Bucke told me and Traubel that it would be absolutely necessary to supply him with a trained nurse. We knew at that time that Whitman had money in bank and we also knew the purpose that he desired to have it used for. We also knew that Whitman's condition was such that with proper attention he might live for years and that this additional expense would be considerable. Whitman did not have a sum of money that would justify such an extraordinary expenditure. It was only by tact and persuasion that we finally induced him to accept. He protested that it was unnecessary and that he preferred to continue to take his chances on living and dying as theretofore. For a period of three years and until his death a fund was raised and used for this purpose only. It was not used for Whitman's *support*, and he continued to support himself so far as ordinary household expenses were concerned,

until his death. During this period we had skilled nurses and sometimes day and night nurses, and thereby Whitman received every care and comfort — which undoubtedly prolonged his life. To this fund some of his friends in England and this country contributed. I am not aware that any of them were of 'slender means.' For a time I was treasurer of the fund, and afterwards Traubel had charge of it. We have a list of the contributors and they include names of men of worldwide fame and some of them of very large means. I do not believe in a single instance the amount contributed was a burden on the contributor. They gave freely and gladly, and, as I have said before, the money was used for the above single purpose.

"With regard to the tomb in Harleigh Cemetery, the lot upon which it was built was literally forced upon him by the managers of the cemetery. A stone mason called at Whitman's house and impressed him with the idea that he could build him a rough tomb for a few hundred dollars and obtained an order to build it. Shortly before Whitman's death he was handed an extraordinary bill for the tomb. I knew that he had been imposed upon and I took charge of the matter and relieved Whitman from all further anxiety. I do not feel called upon to make any further statement with regard to the tomb except to protect the memory of Whitman against the statement that he deliberately incurred so large an expenditure. He built the tomb as much for his family as for himself. His mother, father, and brothers are buried there.

"With regard to the money in bank at the time of

his death, I am not aware that anybody in the world supposed that Whitman was penniless. The exact contrary was always avowed by not only himself but his friends. It was known that he owned the Camden house and that he had received money from royalties as well as from special gifts from friends such as Col. Ingersoll, who handed him the proceeds of his lecture on 'Liberty in Literature.' As before stated, he did not have such an amount of money as would have enabled him to make the extraordinary expenditures aforesaid. He did endeavor to accumulate some money for the purpose of providing for the support of his imbecile brother Eddie, who had been for some years in an institution. Whitman had always contributed one half of the cost of his support, and his darling wish was that this brother should be provided for against all peradventure. If you will examine his will, you will find that he left his money for this purpose. At that time it was thought that Eddie would live for many, many years, but he died within a year or two after Walt's death and the money went to his heirs. I regret very much that I could not have explained these matters to you before you printed your book. In the light of the above situation, you will readily admit that the statements in your book are extremely mischievous."

In spite of the incredulity of Whitman's executors, I feel bound to add that conversations, during 1907, with several surviving contributors to the fund confirm me in the statement as to their "surprise" at the amount of Whitman's property.

Page 278, *line* 24. In the first edition this passage ran: "Each man wrote superbly about paternity, and each deserted his own children. No doubt both men repented bitterly, since both were naturally tender-hearted." Several admirers of Whitman, and especially Laurens Maynard and Dr. Wiksell, have urged me to alter the harsh word "deserted," in view of our present ignorance of the precise facts, and I agree with these friendly critics in thinking that more explicit language is preferable. Students of recent Rousseau literature may be tempted to push this curious parallel even further. Mrs. Frederica Macdonald (*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, London, 1906) and M. Jules Lemaître (*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Paris, 1907; compare also M. Édouard Rod's comment upon these books in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for May 1, 1907) are inclined to the opinion that Rousseau's whole story about sending his children to the foundling asylum was due to an hallucination, and that as a matter of fact there were no children to send. Some of Whitman's friends still hold to a corresponding belief that his letter to Symonds and his statements to one of his executors were based upon the same sort of hallucination. Although I do not personally share this view, future students of Whitman may have to reckon with it. I venture to quote from a letter recently (1907) addressed to me from a well-known admirer and correspondent of the poet: —

"I don't believe in those 'children.' For reasons, of course, precisely opposite to those put forward by ——. The real psychology of Walt Whitman would

be enormously interesting. I think the key-note to it would be found to be a staggering ignorance, or perhaps willful non-perception, of the real physical conditions of his nature. But the truth about him (the innermost truth) escapes from almost every page for those who can read." Compare Lemaître's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, page 59, concerning "la fable des cinq enfans."

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